

September 16, 1962	"What The Gospel Is And Does"	Col. 1:5-8
September 23, 1962	"The Prayer Of A Saint"	Col. 1:9-11
September 30, 1962	"God, The Secret Keeper"	Deut. 29:29
October 14, 1962	"In The Time of The Yellow Corn"	Job 29:5
October 28, 1962	"The Meaning of The Reformation"	
November 4, 1962	"The Inheritance of The Saints"	Col. 1:12-14
November 11, 1962	"All The Fullness of God"	Col. 1:19
November 18, 1962	"Every Man . . ."	Col. 1:28
November 22, 1962	"Exit Gratefully" (Thanksgiving)	Psalms 100:4-5
November 25, 1962	"The True Church"	Col. 2:6-7
December 2, 1962	"When Jesus Was Born"	Matt. 2:1-2
December 9, 1962	"In Bethlehem - In Herod's Day"	Matt. 2:1-2
December 16, 1962	"Wise Men From The East"	Matt. 2:1-2
December 23, 1962	"To Worship Him"	Matt. 2:1-2
December 24, 1962	"The Joy Which is Christmas"	Luke 2:10-11
December 30, 1962	"The Difference Christmas Makes"	Matt. 2:12

January 7, 1962

"LIFE IN THE IMPERATIVE MOOD"

The text is the 29th verse of the 5th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."

From the very beginning, so it seemed, they were always an irritating, an annoying lot; every time the officials, either church or state, had anything to deal with them they went away calling them an impossible group.

They tried to bring one set of charges against them after another. Occasionally they would come up with a charge that they felt would stick, then they would throw these Christians into jail, only to discover that miraculously they had a way of escaping. So these authorities had to deal with the Christians --- this annoying, irritating group of people.

When you come to this 5th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, you find that when they had escaped, the officials, having made note of their release, miraculously, said they must be found.....and where do you suppose they found them?

back in the public square!

back in the shadow of the temple!

doing the same thing over and over again,

in the same way, and for the very same reason!

It was more than the officials could take. So they issued the order---bring them

as quickly as you can, but be careful how you bring them, however.....

They were brought to the officials once more. If ever the issue had clearly been drawn before, there surely was no mistake about it now. The officials simply said,

January 7, 1962	"Life In The Imperative Mood"	Acts 5:29
January 21, 1962	"No Greater Faith"	Matt. 8:10
January 28, 1962	"A Man Named Gamaliel"	Acts 5:34
February 4, 1962	"The First Christian Martyr"	Acts 7:59
February 11, 1962	"Notes From An Early Sermon"	Acts 3
February 18, 1962	"Give What You Have"	Acts 3:6
February 24, 1962	"At The End Of An Era"	Acts 2:40
March 4, 1962	"The Christian Way of Life"	Acts 2:41-47
LENT 1962	Those Deadly Sins A Series	
March 11, 1962	"Those Deadly Sins - Pride"	
March 18, 1962	"Those Deadly Sins - Avarice"	I Tim. 1:6
March 25, 1962	"Those Deadly Sins - Lust"	Rom. 13:11
April 1, 1962	"Those Deadly Sins - Anger"	
April 8, 1962	"Those Deadly Sins - Envy"	I Peter 2:1
April 15, 1962	"Triumphal Entry"	Mark 11:9-10
April 22, 1962	"More Than A Memory"	Luke 24:15
April 29, 1962	"The Intrusive Christ"	John 20:19
May 13, 1962	"The Christian Home"	Luke 2:51-52
May 20, 1962	"A Man Names Matthias"	Acts 1:26
May 27, 1962	"God Gives No Option"	Acts 1:4
June 3, 1962	"Against The World's Hatred"	John 15:26-27
June 10, 1962	"When God Disturbs"	Acts 2:1-2
June 24, 1962	"In Many Convincing Ways"	Acts 1:3
July 8, 1962	"The Soul Seeker"	Luke 15:1
July 15, 1962	"In God's Generous Way"	Luke 6:36
July 22, 1962	"The Big Fisherman"	Luke 5:8
September 2, 1962	"The Christian Workman"	Matt. 6:24
September 9, 1962	"The Two Sides Of The Christian Life"	Col. 1:4

"Again and again we charged you that you were not to speak out
in the name of Jesus Christ. We tell you to shut up!"

On the other side of the line, Peter and the apostles simply respond...

"We have to obey God, not men."

Now there you have it!

On one side---"shut up".....

and the other side---"We have to speak out."

These men and women who took the name of Jesus Christ were people who lived by
imperatives. There were certain things that they were compelled, they were con-
strained to do---they had no choice.

You and I don't always live by imperatives.....

some of us just live naturally, doing one thing after another,
just as it comes, naturally.....

some of us live very easily, following the line of least resist-
ance, going along with the stream and the tide.....

every now and then you discover a person, and perchance you may
be numbered among them, who stands out, who bucks the on-
going tide, and says, "I have no choice--I must live by this
imperative. It is not popular. It is not easy. But I have
no choice. I have my convictions."

They used to say in a grand way about Winston Churchill a number of years
ago, that whatever else you could say about him, he was an old man in a hurry.
God be praised for that kind of a descriptive for a man, perhaps, who had almost
lived more than his allotted time on this earth---there were still some things
that he felt he had to do....he was compelled to speak his piece. They might not
accept his popular program, he might hold on by the skin of his teeth to his seat

in the House of Commons from the district that returned him again and again, but come wind or weather, despite his age, he was content only to live by imperatives---certain things to which he had to be true, even in the declining years of his life.

It behooves each one of us to ask the question...am I an individual who lives by an imperative? are there certain things that I am constrained to do? A devout Christian is always a man who has committed himself to Jesus Christ; and when the chips are down, there is no question about as to where he stands, as to what he will say, or as to what he will do. He must stand in the tradition of the Apostle Peter...."I must do what God compels me to do."

In the past week, in conversation with a parishioner of Saint Luke Church, a question was raised, "Pastor, what are you preaching on this Sunday?"...and so I was able to give at least in essence what this sermon now contains, even as it was beginning to jell at that particular time of the week.

And the reply that came from my honored friend was this--

"Well, it's one thing for you, as a preacher, to stand up and to say to people that they ought to accept the imperative to obey God's voice, but it's high time, it seems to me, that a preacher stands up and tells us how we can discern what God's voice is!".....and the point was well taken.

....there are many people who are willing to do what they think God wants them to do, and that in itself is a noble stand--willing to do what they think God wants them to do, because occasionally we find ourselves unwilling to do what God may want us to do. But the problem may exist for a moment at least..."But Pastor, how can I tell what it is that God wants me to do?".....again and again this comes up in personal counsel....

..."I know, Pastor, even before you begin to speak to me, after

I've told you my problem, you'll say,

'Well, you have no alternative--you have to do as a
Christian what God wants you to do--'

....but how can I tell what it is

that God wants me to do?"

...even sometimes we can mistake our noblest intentions as something that God wants us to do, and maybe our noblest intention is not enough in the sight of God. If you want to be the kind of person who lives by an imperative, compelled to do what God wants him to do,.....then for heaven's sake, preacher, tell us how we can find out what it is that God wants us to do!

(Well, how does a man know what God wants him to do?

How does a man know that this is the voice of God?

Some time ago, and this is as helpful an illustration as I can give you, there was a man who was about to be absent from his business establishment for a period of weeks. He said to the man next in command....

"I shall be away. In all likelihood, during my absence, important decisions will have to be made. Please do not consult me. While I am gone, you are in charge, and I will hold you responsible for making decisions, and I will expect you to make the right decision."

...no small order, my friends, especially when your whole future relationship with the firm could be at stake!

The superior was right. Decisions had to be made during his absence. The man next in command made the decisions. And when the superior came back and went over the work he was gratified, deeply gratified, to discover that his lieutenant had made the right decision. He said, "Now would you mind telling me, how is it possible that you decided this thing the way that you did?"

And the man simply replied...

"I haven't worked here these years for nothing. In all the

time that I have been associated with this firm, I have admired and respected you, and I never found you to make a wrong decision. When the time came that I had to make the decision, I simply did my best to recall your attitude, your thought processes, and then remembering you, I decided the way I thought you would have handled this problem."

...this leads me to believe, and I say it to you now with all the ardor of my soul, that you can't really know what God wants you to do until you first know God. Even as it was the salvation for this lieutenant in this business establishment, he was able to decide properly when the time came because he happened to have caught something of his superior's spirit, he knew something of the basic character and integrity of the man with whom he had been associated all those years, and because he knew him, he knew what to do when the moment of decision came.....I am inclined to believe that this could be the way it is with you and God.)

It could be as simple as all this: if you want to know what God wants you to do, then first know God. Know Him ...how He thinks ...how He reacts.

Why do we teach boys and girls in Sunday School the life and teachings of Jesus Christ?.....

why do we teach boys and girls in Sunday School the life and teachings of the prophets?.....

why do we acquaint them with the Book of the Acts of the Apostles?....

Isn't it this.....? -- to introduce them to these people who, God-inspired, God-motivated, lived the way they did? ...and if we can think about them.....

Last Sunday morning, in teaching the Sorrick Group, I made this observation-- that the people who were called apostles were a limited number of people, and they had to have two qualifications before they could be called an apostle - -

first of all, they had to be men and women who had seen Jesus Christ--
they had a definite first-hand relationship with Him;
and in the second place, they had to be men who were witnesses to the
resurrection....who knew that Jesus Christ was alive.

Now that's exactly what Peter was. Peter was an apostle. And because he was this
kind of a person, he was able to say,

"We know what God wants us to do....

we know what Jesus Christ expects from us in this situation,
and because we are committed to Him, we have no alternative---
we must live by this imperative!"

(I say to you this morning, that this world is going to be saved, and this
world is going to be won, by those who live by imperatives---who are constrained,
again and again, to stand out and to take the side of the eternities---who are com-
pelled to look at this thing through the eyes of God, and there is always a God-way
of looking at a thing...and this is where you and I fail, ever so frequently--we
size the situation up from every other angle possible except God's. A true follow-
er of Jesus Christ is constrained to look at it from God's angle.)

The longer I live, the more I am convinced that men and women need an over-
riding loyalty by which all decisions are structured; and with whatever limited
study I have made of Communism, I am convinced that this is part of the secret for
their success. Let me read for you what someone else has written. So important is
it that I want to read it carefully:

"The Communists would claim that it is loyalty to Communism. A Communist
first before he is a husband, a father, a son. He is a Communist before
he is a miner, a doctor, an engineer. He is a Communist before he is a
Briton, a Frenchman (and while this was written by a European, I could
also add) an American, and must be ready to betray his country without
question so that the victory of Communism can be achieved. He has his
standards of morality, but they are the standards created by Communism.
Truth is what the Party says is truth. Treason is what the Party describes
as Treason. Justice is what the Party calls justice. Communism is the
overriding loyalty which includes all lesser loyalties. This is what the

disciples of Lenin would claim. The truth, of course, is that far from including all other loyalties, it destroys them. It destroys the family. It destroys friendship. It destroys humanity, truth, justice.

The only loyalty which includes all other loyalties and satisfies them all is loyalty to God. God is the Supreme Good and God is love. If you obey God you cannot be false to the principles of truth, justice and humanity. If you obey God! There is nothing wrong with loyalty to family, friends, trade unions, country. These are good things, but without loyalty to God they become mutually destructive and this is the tragedy of our Western World - - that because men have forgotten their loyalty to God they are torn apart by their lesser loyalties and likely to be destroyed by the tensions created by the conflict between these loyalties or to succumb to something like Communism which will end the tensions by destroying all the other loyalties."

(- - E T 10/57)

The longer I live, the more I am convinced that man is made to give himself to something.....man is made to give himself to someone.....and the more it is made clear to him what the basic character of what that thing or person is, so he orders his daily life accordingly.

Jesus Christ was so real to the apostles, they had no choice but to do that which was pleasing in His sight. I am intrigued by the text--"Peter and the apostles answered, we must obey God rather than men".....do you notice, it was Peter and the apostles who answered! What an encouraging thing it was for Peter, who having cast his side with God, found that there was a handful of people who nodded their heads approvingly....

"We think the same thing, Peter - - we agree."

Occasionally there comes in the time of a man's life that lonely moment when he looks around, taking his side on the side of God, and there isn't a single person to encourage him. This is an extremely lonely moment in the life of a man...but none perhaps more glorious.

But what a precious thing it is that when a man does decide to take the side of God, he should be encouraged by others. I cannot say for you what 1962 may bring-----we may be kept from many moments of decision that our Christian brethren in Europe may have to make.....but in our own domestic life, in any area of

life that you may wish--you may not be called to take the witness stand,
that may fall to someone else,

but if somewhere along the highway of life you encounter a person who seems to
be standing alone in the presence of God because he wants to take the side of God,
for God's sake....

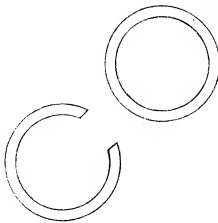
for his sake....

for your sake....

...if you can't do anything else, won't you nod
approvingly?

....1962 could be the year for some of us when that nod of the head,
in support of somebody else who takes his stand brilliantly for God, could mean
that he might have courage enough to take it the next day,
and the day after that.

* * * * *



(this sermon transcribed as recorded)

"NO GREATER FAITH"

The sermon bears the title, "No Greater Faith" and the text is the 10th verse of the 8th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

"When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

Had you been there, my friend, I think I can tell you exactly what the look upon your face would have been. It would have been a look of irritation and annoyance. You would have been greatly disturbed that Jesus Christ could talk this way to a man, especially when it would occur to you that Jesus Christ was not given to exaggeration and that He always meant exactly what He said, and He stated a case exactly as it was. Make no mistake about it, you could have been disturbed and irritated, as I am sure I would have been. For you know what He had said, don't you? He told a man that his faith was greater-- He told a man that his faith was so great that no where in Israel had He seen anything to match it.

Now, you can't possibly appreciate the significance of that statement unless, perchance, I could do it for you this way:

....suppose I had standing alongside of me right now a stranger
to each of you

and I would say, "Members of this congregation, I have standing alongside of me a man whose faith is far greater than yours...in fact, that you might understand exactly what I'm saying, I will put it this way--there isn't a single person among you who has faith that can even match his! Now let me tell you something about him.....

he isn't a Christian.....you are
he's never been baptized.....you have
he's never been confirmed in the Christian faith.....you have
he has not been brought up in so-called religious
tradition.....you have

...but I have come to know this man

(and then this is where you begin to feel

uncomfortable) for I would also have to say--

..I have come to know you, and against both of these statements I have to say this---that I've never seen a faith as great as his!"

.....and I am your Pastor, the shepherd and bishop of your souls. It would almost appear as if I were belittling you...it would almost appear as if I were underestimating your spiritual vitality. Now, if that kind of thing would have happened, you would have been irritated, annoyed and disturbed.

Now something of this same nature was the kind of thing that happened when Jesus Christ said to his disciples and to a company of Jewish people,

"This non-Jew...this pagan

(because that's what they thought of him)

has a faith greater than yours!"

It actually happened, my friend. It's the Bible record.

Now because you and I will have to admit that our faith is not always strong, that our faith, quite frankly, is a weak thing, you and I have to sit at this man's feet; and we do well this morning to try as best we can to understand what it was about his faith that made Jesus Christ commend it. Of all things, you and I are going to sit at the feet of a pagan! to learn something about faith.

As your Pastor, with these six years now that God has given me to walk with you, (I've come to experience one crisis after another in this parish, in the lives of any number of our people. And I'm convinced that your faith isn't nearly as strong as it ought to be, just as I am convinced that my faith isn't as strong as it ought to be. Ever so often, it's far more weak than I am willing to admit, either to you or to myself. It isn't that we don't know about God--it isn't that we haven't been taught....it's simply that when the chips are down, and when the burden of life is very, very great, we are either unwilling or unable to believe that God has some purpose, and that God has a way of dealing with me and with my problem....and then I flounder, and go the way of the weak.) So because for me, I am heartily interested in this man's faith, I've taken for granted that you could be, too. Let me tell you several things about this man's faith.

In the first place, it wasn't formalized.

Every now and then I say to the boys and girls in the catechetical instruction, "If anyone ever says to you, 'Do you believe in God?', and you want to give an excellent answer, stand up and recite for them, clearly and distinctly and with vigor, the Apostles' Creed. This is the statement of what Christians believe!, and as one who has Jesus Christ in his heart, this is a formal way of expressing it."

This man, by the way, had no formal statement of his faith.

The first thing that he had was a respect for human beings as human beings.

You can't possibly read this 8th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew and related chapters in other Gospel records that talk about him without being a bit understanding of the man....that whenever he saw a human being, he saw a human being as a human being---nothing less!

...he was a Roman Centurian

...he was an occupying authority

...he was not a Jew

...but wherever he saw a human being, he saw a soul...and recognized and respected him as such. I have a way of believing that any man who has high regard for a human soul is very, very near to the heart of God, and if I had never believed it before, I most certainly believe it now as I deal with this 8th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew.

This is not always true for you and for me. We have a way of going through life and seeing some people as a little bit less than a human being. We have our status, but witting or unwittingly we hold them in an inferior classification---they're not quite as good as we are! We may not say it in so many words, but there's always the accent in the voice---there's always the thing that we don't say. This man, this pagan, respected every human being as a human being.

The second thing about this man was this: he had a way of permitting himself to be sensitized to the needs of other people. No matter who the person might be, if he was in need, that man had a claim upon his mind and his spirit. So when he comes now to Jesus Christ, he comes to Jesus Christ to ask a favor. And he doesn't ask Jesus Christ to do a single thing for him,

but he says, "Jesus Christ, here's somebody else who stands in need.

---would you please give him some of your attention?"

....When you and I come to God, Item #1 on the agenda is always :

my need....

my sad plight.....

my misery.....

It might be good spiritual discipline for each of us sometime to examine himself and to see how much he talks about himself in God's presence. This man, this pagan, mark you!....who when he had his audience with Jesus Christ, said, "I am here to talk to you, Jesus Christ, about the need of my brother."

I have a way of believing that any man who is drawn close to another human being

is very near to the heart of God himself.

The third thing about this man's faith is that when he came to Jesus Christ, he said, "I am not worthy."

Now here's where we begin to take our own selves to task. Usually we build our own claim in front of God---

"Here I am, God"

---and then if we want to be bold enough and brave enough, we start declaring our virtues and all of our merits, as much as to imply---

"God, you can't possibly ignore me!

...God, you have to pay some attention to me--look who I am!"

...this Roman Centurian, this pagan, never so much as asked God to pay any attention to him except to notice his unworthiness. This is not true for most of us. The last thing that we might ever want God to notice about ourselves is our unworthiness....and oddly enough, that could be the only thing that He might ever notice.

The third thing about this man's faith was this: his faith was so great that he believed that all that Jesus Christ had to do was to speak the word and the thing would be done....no great emphasis on secondary factors, as though there had to be brought into clear focus the way God was going to work, and to see the manipulation and the maneuvering of the hand of God clearly. Your faith and my faith sometimes bogs down at that point, because if we can't see God at work, we just can't believe that He is working. This Centurian's faith was so great that he even believed that God could exercise a kind of remote control....

"God, just think, and it will be done."

....well, this was that man's faith.

Now stack your faith against it, even as I'm stacking my faith against it. I can't admit that when I think of God, I believe that God is equally interested in all people, in all of us. The Centurian believed that because he himself felt that way to a human being! As a human being, he believed that anyone had a rightful claim upon his own soul. Somehow or other, he felt that very same way about God....."Why, if I, a human being, can believe that any human being is worthy of respect, then I believe God would feel the same way."

But this is not always true for you and for me.

We have a way of putting masks upon the face of God.....

an American face, as an example---as though God pays attention only to Americans.....

We have a way of putting masks upon the face of God.....

a white mask---as though God paid attention only to white people.....

We have a way of putting masks upon the face of God....

our own particular religious mask---as though God, as

though God paid attention only to Christians.....

You just can't justify that kind of treatment of God by the Bible view.

Yet when we come exercising our faith, this is the way we think of God, and that's why our faith, sometimes, is as ineffective as it is.

Did you catch the way the Gospel record ends? Jesus said, Go, be it unto you, even as you believe, and at that moment, the servant was healed.....

This is effective faith---when you can qualify as the Centurian qualified.

(We have a way of building up our prejudices, and hide behind walls that we erect, and then we keep God on our side of the wall. If you had the time, and I had the time, and we had the inclination, we'd go on a little trip, and I could take you to a church where, as best I know, right now...one quarter from the front

on this side a man is seated.....one quarter from the rear on the other side, a man is seated---in company with all the other people who are present. But neither respects the fact that the other is there. They come from the same family--the same blood is coursing through their veins. They hear the same sermonsthey sing the same hymns....they offer the same prayers.....but they've built a wall between themselves. Because of a deep-seated prejudice, they even allow that wall to exist down the middle aisle of a church, and each, I think, if he would be hard-pressed, would allow you to believe that God is on his side of the wall.....

"My friend and I have built a wall
Between us, thick and wide;
The stones of it are high with scorn,
And plastered thick with pride.

We talk across those stubborn stones,
So arrogantly tall;
Only we cannot touch our hands,
Since we have built the wall.")

I go back, now, to where I began. Jesus Christ said an exceedingly wonderful thing about this man's faith. And your first introduction to that man is that he was a person who saw another human being as a human being.

One of my favorite saints is Francis of Asissi, the rich man who for Christ's sake became a beggar...who turned his back upon prestige and position. Chesterson has written an interesting "Life of St. Francis." Let me read for you an extract:

"What gave him his extraordinary personal power was this: that from the Pope to the beggar, from the Sultan of Syria in his pavilion to the ragged robbers crawling out of the wood, there was never a man who looked into those brown, burning eyes without being certain that Francis Bernardone was really interested in him; in his own inner individual life from the cradle to the grave; that he himself was being valued and taken seriously, and not merely added to the spoils of some social policy or to the names in some clerical document."

With all my heart, I believe that Jesus Christ commended this man's faith and said, "You're very near to the heart of God," because he first saw this man identified with another human being in his misery and in his need.

If you want to know how far away you are from the heart of God, then begin by asking yourself:

"How close am I to my brother's heart?".....

....and if perchance, my friend, you go on having an argument with me in your mind as the preacher of this sermon, then I dare you to go back and read the 8th chapter of Matthew for yourself, and then see how you come out.

* * * * *

"A MAN NAMED GAMALIEL"

As you may recall, the sermons for the most part this year in Saint Luke Church are being preached upon passages of Scripture from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. Today's sermon bears the title, "A Man Named Gamaliel;" the text is the 34th verse of the 5th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"Then stood there up one in the council, a
Pharisee, named Gamaliel - - -"

It's risky business for any of us always to prefer one person as over against another person, just because we go on impressions. It's a luxury that we all too often allow ourselves. I have been guilty of this when I read the Bible, particularly so when I come to this 5th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles.

I am confronted by two men who dominate this closing section--a man by the name of Peter--another man by the name of Gamaliel. And when I see them together, I have immediately been drawn to the one as over against the other. There's something about Peter that I admire and respect.....there's something about Gamaliel that I just can't quite appreciate. I frankly admit to you, this is not fair. This is not done scientifically. This could be a matter of temperament---temperament of mine going out to meet the temperament of someone else...

---temperament of mine being allergic to a particular temperament of somebody else.....

but I say to you, it's risky business--to like one
person at the expense of another.

In order to better appreciate what I have just said, let me remind you, now, of the actual background behind both of these men.

Jesus Christ allowed his church to be in the hands of his disciples. Eventually certain men became leaders in the movement which was known as the Christian Church.....

...Peter, now, stands out as a giant among men--possessed by Jesus Christ, he just can't keep his mouth shut. Wherever he goes he wants to tell them about the love of God which has come to him in Christ. He gets a group of people who believe the same thing. And every now and then they get into trouble with the authorities, and as you may remember from other sermons being preached in this series, they are thrown into jail....they are the rabble-rousers...they are accused of inciting to a riot...

...Peter has been in prison - -

(and God has a way of being mindful of His own)

- - miraculously he is released. Once he escapes, he goes back to the same place...

does the same thing...

for the same old reason.....he just can't keep quiet about Jesus Christ.

Now the authorities discover that he has been released from prison. The order is given, he must be found. And when they find him, they bring him back to face the charges....and they say, "We warned you!" - - "We straitly charged you;" is the way the Scriptures put it...."that you were not to preach in his name!"

...and then Peter says - that classic, eloquent reply of his -

"We must obey God rather than men"and as though

that weren't enough, Peter goes on to give them a sermon. He not only defies them by his attitude, but he makes them listen to what he has to say.

There's something about this man that I admire and respect.

He is forever a man of action.

He just can't keep quiet.

He is forever taking off his coat, rolling up his sleeves,

getting into the midst of something.

He just wasn't made to stand in the sidelines...

"Time is running out---I have to witness for Jesus Christ!"

"- - to as many people as I can,

as often as I can,

wherever I can - -

--no man is going to shut me up!"

This is my man, Peter.

Now, over against him you find this man, Gamaliel. A Pharisee...

...who has been observing what has been going on.

He knows that Peter has miraculously escaped from prison.

He knows, now, the authorities have laid hold upon him once more.

He knows that the authorities mean business, and they'll slap

him back in jail as soon as they possibly can.

And then, having been acquainted with the ways of the world, he

reads hate in their eyes--and they're out for blood..and

even as a matter of Scriptural record, the enemies of the

Christian Church have made up their minds that they're

going to kill Peter and the disciple band.

...it's always a dreadfully serious thing to take

any man's life---whether it's an eye for an eye,

a tooth for a tooth--whether it's an accident or whether it's outright pre-meditated murder....it's always a dreadfully serious thing to kill a man.....

Now Gamaliel, the Pharisee, stands up, and he says,

"I'd like to say something."

Skillfully he quiets the mob. He must have been a master to have been able to do it.....

..and you'd think that right there at that point I would applaud and sing his praise, and hopefully I might say to myself, "Gamaliel, cast your lot in with Peter---tell this angry mob that you believe that what Peter is saying is right! ---tell them, Gamaliel, that there comes a time in a man's life when he has to stand out from the crowd, too, and say, 'I cast my lot with a man like Peter'"... ..but alas and alack, Gamaliel doesn't speak like that.

Gamaliel simply says, "I want to tell you something....once upon a time - - "

and then he begins citing two instances

" - there was this man - - you may remember it - - you were troubled and disturbed by what he was preaching, by what he was doing, but you simply waited. He ran his course! The fire burned out!

- - that was absolutely true with this other fellow--remember him? We did nothing. We simply stood by and let them have their day. They gradually deteriorated."

Now Gamaliel says, "I want to tell you something, now, about these people. If God is on their side, as they say, then nothing that you and I can do can ever stop them. But if God isn't on their side.....

(then Gamaliel might just as well have said)

...this thing will blow up! It just can't last!"

And Gamaliel now becomes the patron saint to all those who are cautious--not brave--not daring--not willing enough to come out and say, "There's something about this man that I have to respect and I'll cast my lot with him."

Gamaliel is the patron saint, I say, of all those who play it safe
...cool....."let's wait....."

I'm ashamed of myself. I've never been fully able to appreciate Gamaliel.

I've always felt that he should have thrown his weight behind Peter.

Maybe that's part of the difficulty that I have with my own temperament...

this keen desire to have things done--to get the world
moving by 10:30 tomorrow morning--not a bit later!

....and Peter was that kind of man

Action! Now! Here! ...is what we have.

".....Talk about consequences--I don't know what they
may be! I'm not sure how I'll end up.

I only know that right now I have to take the
leap....."

I can't quite appreciate Gamaliel

"Easy now! Let's not do anything until, until we
acquaint ourselves first of all with the consequences.
Let us make certain before we act, or if we can't do this,
let's just wait. At least we won't get involved!"

I can never quite appreciate Gamaliel for that....

".....we just won't get involved - - wait....."

Peter....

".....Act! I am compelled to do so!....."

I suppose any movement, any church, any people, can easily number its Gamaliels and its Peters. I say this quite candidly...while I was denied the privilege of being with you in your beginning years, I am quite certain when Saint Luke Church was very, very young, there must have been people who said,

".....We'll wait. We won't get involved with this

new mission. I don't know that you can follow a

man like Bieber. I'm not so sure that they

can make a go of it. We'll just wait. If

the thing works out fairly well, then we'll

identify ourselves....."

They tell me, across the nation this reaction, at least, is typical of many, many congregations....always those who hesitate

who play it cool....safe....cautious.

And on the other hand, God has His Peters

who believe with intensity - - "Let's begin!

We may fail, but at least we've

made a beginning."

Name any area of our life, socially, politically, religiously.....you can number your Peters.....you can number your Gamaliels.

(Now at this point in the sermon I want to make an admission. The older I become, the more I recognize how unfairly I've dealt with Gamaliel. He may not be the giant in character, in personality and in temperament as Peter, but I am ashamed that I ever sold him short. For Gamaliel also serves. Gamaliel may be the kind of a man who may not help a cause along, but at least he's willing to take a stand to see that other people won't hurt it.)

Peter may be the kind of man who sees that certain things are done---Gamaliel is also the kind of man who sees that certain things are not done---and those certain things that could have been done, had it not been for Gamaliel, might have brought

a kind of stranglehold on the cause of Jesus Christ, temporarily, and could have been a pronounced impediment for Peter and his company.

As I read again about Gamaliel and Peter, I say to myself.....God in His mercy,

God in His wisdom, allows us both, and each in his own way serves the Kingdom.

Many a congregation, many a family has been blessed because there has been someone who has said--

"We have to do something about it right now!"

...and the call for action was made. Something was done.

Many a congregation, many a family has been blessed because every now and then there has been someone who has said--

"While I cannot support you, I will not thwart you--

I will not frustrate you--I will not hinder you."

and may even have gone one step better than that--

"....and I'll make it my business to see that no one else stands in your way."

I've always been puzzled by this matter of temperament. Sometimes I think we can't possibly appreciate how some people work against the very thing that characterizes them, and who knows but what their prayer could be..."O God, I wish I could feel differently. Why must I be this way?"

It takes a pretty big man to recognize that there could be a Gamaliel in someone.... and it takes a pretty big man to be a Gamaliel to recognize that there could be a Peter in other people. The Kingdom of God goes forward by those who act at once. And the Kingdom of God goes forward because there are those who, even though they cannot help, they will not hinder.

I'm always excited when I read the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. It makes me believe as never before how the Christian Church is made up of giants of

character and those who are lesser levels...and yet each in his own way was able to serve.....

Gamaliel might not have done the best possible thing that day for the Christian Church, but he did a good thing. Both were necessary....

-- Peter's fervent desire to launch out into the deep....

-- Gamaliel's willingness to say to a people--

"Hold your fire. Don't get in their way."

Whatever progress was made that day, it was made because both voices were heard.

* * * * *

"THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR"

Continuing the series of sermons being preached this year in Saint Luke Church upon passages of Scripture from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, today's sermon bears the title, "The First Christian Martyr," and the text is the 59th verse of the 7th chapter of the Book of the Acts:

"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon
God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive
my spirit."

It was common talk around Jerusalem, of course it was...."If that fellow doesn't watch out, he's going to get himself killed. And what a pity! He's so young--so young to die....crusader, riding on a white horse--why doesn't someone tell him to keep quiet?" Surely that's the way they talked about Stephen. For he was young, and he was a crusader, and he just wouldn't keep quiet. What do you know about Stephen, my friend? He ought to be among your favorites in the book of the saints, if for no other reason, then certainly for this--he was the first Christian martyr.

Now let me say at once, soon or late, it had to be Stephen. For as we have been dealing with the Book of the Acts of the Apostles since we began last fall, we've come upon men who are brought to the very brink of death...

..men thrown into prison

..men who were at the mercy of an infuriated mob

...none of them, up to this point, had been killed.

But by the very shape of things, it could happen any minute...and it happened to Stephen.

Stephen was one of those men chosen by the early Christians to serve, if you please, as a church councilman. This is how it all began. From the Order

For The Institution of Church Councilmen we are reminded that the early church discovered that there were certain duties that had to be cared for. These people who were going out preaching and telling the good news of Jesus Christ just couldn't be bogged down by certain menial chores. And so someone said, "Let us look around and see if we can't find some honest men, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, who can help assume this kind of responsibility." And when they looked around, they found a man like Stephen. And Stephen was enlisted.

He took it gladly and he took it willingly. And one of the things that Stephen had to do was to go out and visit the poor and the needy. When people couldn't come to church, Stephen would be one of those men who took the church to them. If people were lonely, Stephen was the kind of man who visited them in their loneliness. If people were discouraged, Stephen was the kind of man who took the church into the home and brought them hope and courage.

But Stephen wasn't a man who was content just to run errands. He could never have been perfectly happy just taking a bag of groceries into somebody's home. Stephen was a man who had to do some preaching. If he ever had a chance to tell people about Jesus, he began speaking. If he ever found people who were stiff-necked and stubborn and refused to hear the good word about Jesus, he called them by that name....

...you just don't go around calling people
stiff-necked and stubborn! It had to happen this way,
...and it happened to Stephen.

As I recall the story of Stephen, I write down first of all at the bottom of the page...."As it happened to the Master, so it happens to the servant...."
....they did this sort of thing to Jesus Christ---He whose heart was overflowing with love for people...in the end was killed. If Jesus Christ could not escape

it, why, then, should a follower ever permit himself to think for a single minute that he could escape it? Now that's one thing that you and I have to bring into clear and sharp focus immediately. Whether it's because some of us preachers do not preach the full Gospel--whether it's because we accent too much the kind and gracious hand of God which pats a man on the back and says, "Everything's going to be all right---don't worry overmuch!".....whether it is because we preach and share a watered-down version of the Gospel---I don't know exactly why.....but too many of us succumb to the notion that once you believe in Jesus Christ, that everything is going to work out perfectly all right.....

....you have only to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the sun begins to shine immediately--that is,

I'm talking, now, about the outward circumstances....

This just isn't true!

You could name some saints who never really discovered what misery was until after they became fervent followers of Jesus Christ.....

You could find some people who never wanted heaven so much as when they were experiencing Jesus Christ, and then with this passion of theirs to claim heaven, discovered first-hand how much hell there is, right here on earth.....

When you think of Stephen as the first Christian martyr, you have to accept the fact that life has its brute force---that life has those who are hostile and unkind.

(I recall so easily, in the impressionable years of my teenage period of life, I was laboring along with the notion that everybody would respond to anyone who was kind and gracious. I just couldn't believe that there was a kind of person who, treated with love, would not respond with love. And one of my adult counselors took me aside one time and he said, "Some day, you may discover the hard way that this is true---that love does not always get love in return!" It happened a long, long time ago when the world was young. Evil, even in the very beginning chapter

of the history of man, raised it's ugly head, and it's been here ever since. And when you read the story of the martyrs, you discover it's the very simple story of hatred turning its angry face upon our love. It happened to Jesus Christ, and it can happen to anyone who follows in the footsteps of Jesus.)

The second thing that I learned from the life of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, is this; that it happened only because he permitted himself to get involved....

if he only would have taken the package of groceries and put it on the kitchen table and put on his hat and gone his way....

if only he would have been interested in gathering the funds and distributing to the needy, and stopping at this point.....

...but chances are, Stephen was the kind of man who became involved with the issue....

"....Why are people the way they are?

--why do they allow certain things to continue to exist?"

...and because he became involved, he found himself in this position--where he had to stand on the principle that what he knew in his heart was true. That's a martyr, isn't it? - - a martyr who goes on believing in the right, even though in the end it will kill him. Stephen was that kind of person.

Now, to be quite frank with you, I've had a great deal of hesitation about this sermon, both in its preparation and as I came to the pulpit to deliver it.... because I'm not so sure that enough of us have ever found ourselves in the position as Stephen found himself. We have a way of tripping along through life rather merrily. Very few of us have ever been crushed to the ground, broken in body and spirit. Now let me pause precisely at this point to remind you how Stephen met his death....

....the infuriated mob took him bodily and threw him down from the brow of the hill, into something like an

enclosure, where he couldn't escape.....

and while he was held captive down there, mad men
that they were, they reached for the biggest stones
that they could grasp and they threw them at him....and
they kept throwing until his bones were crushed, and
the ground was stained with his blood...and there was
no longer life....

....chances are, none of us has ever, in the name
of Jesus Christ, found himself in a situation where that would happen.

And I've kept debating with myself---why, then, preach a sermon to a congregation who have never run a risk like that? Perhaps vicariously we can appreciate those to whom it has happened. But if it should happen---if life some way could bring its cruel pressure against you, break your heart---suppose you have to carry a burden thrust upon you, not of your making....what then? You've been brought up on this Christian teaching--that you should return love, no matter what you get.....suppose this should be your lot? Will there be something of Stephen in you?

I marvel at Stephen. He died with a prayer upon his lips.

And I marvel at the way the recorder of the record puts it....

"And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

....the writer of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles couldn't find it possible to say....."and then he died." Saints never die. They are constantly in league with the Eternal. The body may be broken, but the spirit remains inviolate. And that leads me to this observation for you, and I say it to myself just as heartily as I say it to you....if I should ever find myself in a situation in any

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degree comparable to Stephen, I hope that I would remember how it was that Stephen was sustained.

Two things sustained him....

(He never for a moment took his eye away from God.

Now this is what causes you and me so much trouble. We focus our eye upon the burden. We focus our eye upon those who treat us unkindly. We can't get them out of our minds. Stephen's face was transfigured because all the while this was happening to him, he never for a moment took his mind off of God. Bishop Hans Lilja, of our church in Hanover, has written a very helpful book called, "In The Valley of the Shadow," and some of that book deals with the time when he was imprisoned because of Hitler. He describes very vividly his cell. You can almost hear the agonizing cries of those about to be killed. You can almost see the stains of blood on the floor of his cell. But Hans Lilja says the only thing that enabled him to keep his Christian sanity was that he never for a day allowed himself to think of anything other than God's protecting care and the eternal purposes of God.

Stephen kept his face on God.)

(There's an English short story that tells about a woman who was very much in love with her husband. And she finds out one day that he runs away with her dearest friend. She leaves England, she goes to Italy. She lives in bitterness and resentment. All she can think of is two people, and what they have done to her. In the confessional she lays bare her soul to her priest...and the priest suggests, in this short story, that she quit thinking about those two people, and he says, "Human as you are, you may not find it easy to do this, but maybe you'd better remember that stolen happiness can never last, and their misery

may some day become torture." "I suggest," says the priest, "that you think about God's unfailing love to you, and as God's heart is broken, so yours could be broken." She left the confessional booth, and the very first thing that she did was to make out her will, and she willed her home to those two people. Don't you for a minute think it was for a kind of revenge, whereby she would force them to live in a memory of her kindness--God knows it could have become that... but it was a grand and glorious gesture on her part, whereby she remembered that there is something in this world that could be called the love of God, and she was willing to show a little bit of it through her.)

Stephen dies asking God to forgive these men. He could never have talked that way, and there could never have been a halo around him, if he had not kept his mind on God.

And the second thing is this....

Stephen could never have done what he did if he had not kept the channel of communication open between God and him.

He kept praying....praying.....praying - - all the time he was surrounded by the people he kept talking with God!

I have never had a time in my life when I was tempted not to pray, but I know that people have been tempted not to pray. And it could happen to me some day, when the burden becomes so great that I, too, might say, "What's the use?" But Stephen died the way he did--triumphantly, gloriously....because he kept the channel of communication open between God and him. Beloved, if the burden should ever become so great for you, keep that channel of communication open between God and you. It will be your only hope---it will be your only salvation.

You want some good Sunday reading today? Read the 6th and 7th chapters of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. Make friends with Stephen!

(this sermon transcribed as recorded)

"NOTES FROM AN EARLY SERMON"

Today's sermon is another in the series based upon passages of Scripture from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. Today's sermon bears the title, "Notes From An Early Sermon."

Let me say to you at once that I think that if I were ever to be found in an unguarded moment, I might be foolish enough to suggest an improvement on the title, the Book of the "Acts of the Apostles"...for it seems to me this is not a fair statement. When Luke made the record of what the apostles were doing, he also included what happened to them and what they said. There is, let me say to you at once, an amazing amount of preaching in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. To all intents and purposes, the Book of the Acts is the record of where the apostles went....what they did....what miracles they wrought,,,what happened to them....

...but also included, if not on every page, then almost every other page, is the record of what they said. Maybe it's the preacher in me that wants to see the preacher given his due credit, for this is not simply a record of what the apostles did--it's also a record, an exceedingly fine chronicle, of what they said.

There is, on the part of some people, a tendency to play down the preacher. There are some people who would get rid of preachers if they could....

"...We have too many words - - words are futile....."
...that's what they say---that's what they think.....

"...It isn't what a man says, after all, that counts--
it's what a man does!....."

I'm not so sure that that's a safe statement.

I agree wholeheartedly with George Buttrick, a distinguished preacher, who was scheduled to make an address in a certain city; and on his way he had to lay over at a certain village. And he said to the station-master, "I've an hour or two to spend here in your town---have you a suggestion as to what I might do?" Proud villager that he was, he said, "Why don't you walk down and visit our high school? We've a rather attractive auditorium and they're getting it ready for the graduation service tonight."

So off Buttrick went to visit the town high school. And as he entered the auditorium, his eye was taken immediately to what some eager-beaver had put above the arch at the front of the hall--the class motto:

DEEDS - - NOT WORDS

Buttrick took issue at once in his own mind....

"This is not fair. It isn't right to say that words don't count."

Says Buttrick....

"Words are deeds. Words are the deeds of a man's lips. Words are what a man can do when he speaks. It's the end product of the use of his lips. If you look at a chair, if you look at a table, and say 'This is what a man has done with his hands--this chair, this table, is the deed of his hands.....'"

So Buttrick maintains, and rightfully so...

"Look at these words---this is what a man has done with his lips." Words are deeds. Words are important. Even Luke, the recorder of the record of the Acts of the Apostles, could not ignore the fact that time and again, ever so often, the apostles went preaching...talking...proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

(Never under-estimate the value of a word. There are some people whose lives have been changed because of what they have heard people say. There are some

women who go through life facing any kind of disappointment because they know somewhere, at journey's end, there will be someone who can look them straight in the eye, call them by name, and say certain words--words which they need to hear --words which alone give them courage and confidence.....

...It isn't a facetious thing when he says to her, "Keep saying it, honey, keep saying it---keep saying it!"

I speak from my own personal experience, I can name two men for you who have influenced my life for good by what they said. At a certain period in my life they took me to task, and by the might, the power and the majesty of their words challenged my soul; and whenever I am tempted to become less than the person that I think God wants me to be, I have only to remember what they said to me--the words they spoke.)

.....Words are important. And again I say to you, Luke, in putting down the record of the early Christian church, chapter after chapter deals with what the apostles said....it's their preaching that's important.

.....Words are important because they become the crystallization of a man's thought. The little girl spoke more truthfully than she might be willing to admit when she said, "How do I know what I think until I first say it?"

Today in this series of sermons, I pause to ask you to recognize the tremendous import of the preaching of the early church. And I've taken one chapter--the 3rd chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, and I've studied it, and this sermon becomes a condensation of that chapter. And as I read this sermon, preached by Peter, I discover four salient things which I believe were forever typical of the preaching of the early church....

First of all, in this third chapter, it's made very, very plain that every man is a sinner. Whenever the early preachers stood up to preach, they struck that note vigorously. Oh, they began telling about how God loved the

world and how God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ....

....and then quickly the preacher comes in--in almost every sermon that they preached....

"...but do you know what?---do you know what man did with Jesus Christ? Man destroyed Him! Man ignored Him! Man evaded Him.... and when man had the choice, given by Pontius Pilate---'What will I do, now, with Jesus who is called the Christ?'---man deliberately chose a murderer as over against Jesus Christ!"

Said the early preacher....

"...Man is a sinner. And sin, left to itself, turns itself against good, and will even, on occasion, call good evil. Now you're a sinner..."

That's the way the preachers talked....

"...Jesus Christ was killed, and you're responsible for that, because this is what sin can do."

There aren't very many people who are willing to accept the fact that they're sinners. Dwight L. Moody used to tell the story about people who came to hear him preach. And then he said, "There are people on the outside who say--'Well this kind of preaching isn't for me, but I will admit that he does a lot of good--he's getting drunkards to be converted---he's getting harlots to change their lives---he's doing a lot of good for some people....'"

...and then Dwight L. Moody, with the insight given to a saint of God, would say, "It never occurred to them that maybe my preaching could speak to their condition, too. For my preaching is geared to sinners...and who is there among us who hasn't sinned?"

(It's a matter of historical record that the mother of Charles W. Eliot, then president of Harvard University, had heard that a friend of hers had joined the Episcopal church, and she wrote her a letter.....

"Dear Eliza, (for that was her name)

They tell me you've joined the Episcopal church!
Now honestly, you don't get down on your knees
in church, do you, and call yourself a miserable
sinner? This kind of thing I will never do, nor
any member of my family....."

Now when you come to recognize the preaching of the early church, the fact
of sin was never glossed over.....

it was ugly.....

it was deadly....

and when it went unleashed, it crucified Jesus Christ.

And Peter, shaking his finger, said---"and you're a sinner!"...and he
was looking every member of his congregation straight in the eye.)

That's the first thing that I discover in the preaching of the early church.
The second thing that I make note of when I recognize the type of preaching that
prevailed in the early church is this.....man is a sinner---

--God is the eternal, perpetual LOVER...

...who even though man as a sinner may kill Jesus
Christ, God loves him just the same, and God comes in for
the last word. The sinner never has the last word. Says
the preacher of the apostolic church...

"...God raised up Jesus Christ from the dead."

....this is the second salient truth--
the resurrection---Jesus Christ is alive! God is more powerful
than Satan! Life is lord over death! Love is greater than hate!
And every one of these preachers said..."We know this to be true
because we are eye witnesses to this truth! And we know that
Jesus Christ is alive in our hearts! This is the cardinal truth

of the Christian religion---that the Redeemer is alive!...."

And then the apostolic preachers were always able to say...

"We have Exhibit A at hand---right here in your midst there is someone to prove it! I believe it....my friends believe it....

...Jesus Christ is alive!"

(King George the Fifth made an excellent address on Christmas Day, 1933. His subjects were so impressed by his address, they said, "Let us preserve it for posterity." So a phonograph record has been deposited in the British Museum. And there it rests---there it remains, until five thousand years from now, when they will hear his voice again....

....as far as the apostolic preachers were concerned, the voice of Jesus Christ is not preserved anywhere except in the believer's heart. And that voice ^{is} ~~is~~ being heard today.

One doesn't wait until some far distant time to hear the voice of Jesus Christ.) This was the second thing that the apostolic preachers knew.

Man is a sinner....

But God is the lover who forgives, and whose power is at work in the world today.....

And the third thing that they said....

This power that God has by which to work is available to each one of us.

It isn't reserved for some distant saint.....

It isn't reserved for someone removed from this world....

"...Why, here I am" says the apostolic preacher....

"...I am standing in your midst. I have this power!

My life has been changed. Jesus Christ is in my heart--
right now."

...This is what they believed. This was apostolic preaching.

With all my heart, I wish that someone could say that this is the preaching of Saint Luke Church. I would fail you, my friend, if on any given Sunday you should come to Saint Luke Church and you would not hear from this pulpit, in one way or another, the declaration of the truth that you are a sinner. If I should portray you as anything other than that, I would not be fair--I would not be truthful. There are pulpits in this land where when people go to church they are led to believe that "Day by day in every way I'm getting better and better and better..." ...and never so much as a word--"Until Jesus Christ comes into your heart, your heart is black!"

(I should be very happy indeed if every time you came to Saint Luke Church you would go away with the words from the sermon ringing in your ear that Jesus Christ is alive.

I should be very happy indeed if every time you came, crossing the threshold of Saint Luke Church, you were made aware of the reality of Jesus Christ. Unashamedly, and don't you dare call it pure vanity, but unashamedly I would be disturbed if any one of you could ever go from this place doubting the fact that Jesus Christ is in the heart of the preacher...

...how can I share with you what you ought to have, if I myself don't have it?

...and how could I hope for a responsive note in your

life if I did not believe that Jesus Christ is there?)

Part of the glory of Saint Luke Church lies in the fact that there is this response,

...this heart to heart and mind to mind and spirit to spirit---

--one with the other claimed by Jesus Christ.....

we sing the same songs of the redeemed....

we walk on common ground in the company of the fellowship of

the faithful.....

Who are we?

....people who keep saying to each other

"Jesus Christ is alive! Jesus Christ is alive!

I know it! I know it!

Together let us claim it."

(They tell a beautiful old story about King Richard. He had an agreement with a servant of his. He knew the time would come when he would be separated from his people...and somehow he believed that no matter where he might go and no matter what might happen to him, his subject would search for him the whole world over... ..and King Richard knew that many things might happen to him in the course of those weeks and months of separation from his people. Maybe he'd be no longer recognized, by his facial features, as the king. And so the king and the servant decided upon a song that they would sing. They memorized the verses, and they would never forget what they had memorized.....chapter after chapter develops in the story. The king is separated from his people...the subject goes looking for his king, and when he goes in a company of prisoners, he begins singing the song. First he sings stanza #1...and then he listens if anyone else will ever sing back the second stanza. So he went wandering over the face of the earth, until one day---did he hear aright?---he finished singing the first stanza, and there came back to him, clearly, the words of the second stanza! To make certain, he sang the third stanza...and then there came back to him the fourth stanza! They were the only ones on the face of the earth who knew it, and what joy they knew in their hearts.....for each sang the same song....and they were found by the song that they knew in their hearts.

...so I would like to think that Sunday after Sunday when you and I meet in this holy place, we meet each other---the response is always the same.....

...I say to you---Jesus Christ is alive!

and the response---The Lord is in my heart! He is alive!)

Well, after the preachers had gone on that way, striking these three different points, they brought their sermon to a conclusion--time and again it was always this way....they ended by challenging the people. Good preaching is always preaching for a verdict--aiming for a response.

...and after Peter and all the apostles had preached

"...you are a sinner.....

God forgives you.....

Jesus Christ is alive.....

...then the preacher would come in and say

"...Now, you.....repent! If you didn't believe this,
believe it now. Change your evil way and come now
to the Lord Jesus Christ!....."

(Great preaching is always preaching that moves a person to do something, to see a life changed. My preaching will fail you, my friend, if on any given Sunday you go away from this place perfectly content with the kind of person you are. But if, by the grace of God, the sermon could provoke you to want to become a little bit better---a little bit more humble---a bit more sensitive to the fact that you are a sinner, with a resolve to offer Jesus Christ a firmer commitment, then that sermon has been worth preaching...and worth listening to.)

They always ended their sermons by saying...."Repent--change in favor of Christ!"

(Rufus Jones, God bless his soul, tells the story about a man who was wandering along a country road...he wanted to get to a certain place, and he wasn't sure that he was traveling in the right direction, so he said to a young man--"Tell me, how far is it in this direction to such-and-such a place?", thinking, of course, that he was on the right road. And the young chap said, "Hister, if you keep going in the same direction that you are now, it may take you 25,000 miles to get there. But if you'll simply turn around and head in the other direction, you can get there in 3 miles." Soon or late, each of us must meet the ultimate destiny. It doesn't have to take us as long as an indefinite period of time. It's possible today to get very near to the heart of God, but for some of us, we may have to turn around.)

"GIVE WHAT YOU HAVE"

The sermon bears the title, "Give What You Have," and the text is the 6th verse of the 3rd chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none;
but such as I have give I thee: In the name
of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk."

It can be a very annoying thing to be distracted when you're on your way to a prayer meeting. That's just about the thing that happened to Peter and John. Good and faithful Christians that they were, they couldn't have done completely with their Jewish background, and one of the good Jewish customs to which they had been exposed was that three times a day they would pray; and if they were in the temple area, they would offer their prayers to God from within the temple.

Being true to their traditions, it was three o'clock in the afternoon, and, devout men that they were, they headed toward the temple to pray. But while they were going toward the temple they were delayed. There was a man, a cripple from birth, a beggar, who cried out for alms. For those of us who like to think that there are times in the day when we are devotionally inclined, we need every quieting influence that we can get to attend us on our way to prayer, and we dislike being distracted and being disturbed.

Peter and John were disturbed by the crying need of a man, and the record is such that Peter and John stopped where they were...the prayer meeting could wait. This is in the Bible--as though we are led to believe that in the sight of God a hand outstretched to a brother in need is every bit as sacred as hands folded reverently in prayer....and if one must wait until his hands can be folded in prayer, until the hand is outstretched to help, then let the need of the brother be met.

The man cried out for money. It was the same old cry that he'd been making year after year because every day of his life his friends brought him to this spot. They believed, you see, that people were more generous if either they were going to church or coming from church, and it was to this fellow's advantage to be in the shadow of the temple.

And so he went on saying the same old thing.....

"Give me! Give me! Give me!"

...the kind of cry that still rings in the ears
of the traveler in the Near East.....

"Baksheesh! Baksheesh! Baksheesh! - -

Give me! Give me! Give me!....."

And then Peter said...

"But I haven't any silver and I haven't any gold - - "

Well, let's stop there for a moment. A man doesn't have to travel very far in life until he discovers that the highway of life is crowded by pilgrims who have one thing in common: the thing that characterizes every man is that he is a person in need--in need of something or in need of someone. Now this is the thing that some of us have discovered...there isn't a single person here this morning who doesn't need something. The very fact that you're in God's House is evidence of the truth that you are in need of coming together with other Christians. You just can't be a Christian by yourself.....

...there's a need in my life that you help satisfy when you come
here on a Sunday morning

...there's a need in your life that all the rest of us who are

here help to satisfy when we come at the same time that you come...
a Christian needs the encouragement and the inspiration of other people who mark the same path to pray.....

...together we have this need

- - to sing our praises to Jesus Christ

...together we have this need

- - to offer our prayers to the Almighty, that out of his
providence He may smile graciously upon us

...together we have this need

- - when, as we wait to hear the words of the Pastor--"The
Almighty and merciful God grant unto you, being penitent,
pardon and remission of all your sins, time for amendment
of life, and the grace and comfort of his Holy Spirit."

....this is the need that we have.

And that's one reason why some of us come here--to be assured that that need is being met and fulfilled, through each other, and by the grace of God, through the precious promises of Jesus Christ.

(You don't have to travel very far in life until you discover that every man is in need--in need of something or in need of someone. Peter and Jehn, on the way to church, discovered the eternal symbol of a beggar...

"Give me what you have....you have something that I need!"

...this is the parable of life--every man in need, and every man having something that another man could stand to benefit, if only this man would share it.)

The second thing that we discover in life is that as we travel along the way we find people who are truly sensitive to the fact that there are other people who are in need. They are the gracious ones. They are the people who go out of their way to dry our tears. They are the ones who look at us and sense immediately a deep-seated hunger that ought to be met. Life does have its gracious ones. Life does have its group of people who are forever sensitive to the fact that there are people in need. It's this truth that becomes an encouragement to many of us. Some of us,

perhaps, couldn't face tomorrow if we didn't believe that in our time of need God would raise up someone who would be sensitive. I treasure a file that I keep.... little things written by certain people. Our paths have crossed - - one sentence... "you came to me when I needed the ministry of the church most - "...that's all that it says....and I hardly knew him.

God has a way, sometime, if only we will permit it, by which He makes us sensitive to the needs of other people.....

This should become a measure of encouragement to us....

--an encouragement that there are those who would be sensitive
to our needs

--an encouragement to us to serve the role that by the Grace of
God we may be the ones who may appear at the precise moment
when the need is greatest

...Life does have people like that.

Peter and John fall in that category. They just couldn't go on to that prayer meeting without stopping and paying attention--without being sensitive to the fact that this man was in need.

And when you and I say....this I believe, preacher--but what will
you do when the need is so great, and
my resources so inadequate?.....

The needs of these people.

Sometimes they come suddenly. Sometimes they come quickly--overnight.

It's last night's fire.....it's this morning's need for clothing
and shelter

It's last night's unexpected, hurried trip to the emergency room...

...it's the immediate need now, not yesterday,
but right now, for the blood transfusion, and

for someone to volunteer to take the wife back and forth..

...back and forth

It's that sudden bolt out of the blue....and right now the need for someone
simply to come and sit and to pray and to counsel

The needs may come quickly.

Or the need may be of long-standing duration.

It's amazing to discover how many needs are perennial. Why, mark you, this man who was a crionle, was a cripple for forty years!--all of these years he was in the same spot and his need was just as great three years ago....five years ago....fifteen years ago.....thirty years ago. The need is there---of long-standing or of short duration.

And over against that need I say to myself.....

perchance I am sensitive to it now--perchance I am aware of it
--perchance this thing haunts me. (But what have I to give?
My resources are so limited.

Peter said, and honestly so--

"Silver and gold have I none. You want money? I haven't any
to give - - "

And that wasn't all that Peter didn't have.

Peter didn't have much of an education.

Peter didn't have much social status.

I hesitate to tell you this, but it's a matter of truth---a short while ago

he didn't have much moral steadiness either. He was the chap
who said one thing to Jesus Christ, and within a period of
24 hours did just the opposite.

There was a time in his life when he wasn't a very stable person.

There are a lot of things that Peter did not have.

But the world isn't much interested in what we don't have. When the need arises, we are simply there to use whatever it may be that we do have.

And that is to the credit of Peter.)

He didn't tarry long in the fact that "Silver and gold I don't have - "

...but immediately he went on to say that

"Such as I do have, you can share."

(Frank Laubach is an extraordinary Christian who is part of the contemporary scene. A very amazing personality. He developed a kind of strategy that's as old as the hills. There aren't too many who belong to the tradition - - he's branded it CIHYU - - that's his name for it, but it's very simple.

He simply gets up in the morning and he says to his Heavenly Father,

"Dear God, today help me to cross the path of somebody else in need. And if it please Thee, Heavenly Father, let that man's need be met through me in one way or another."

Now do you know what he does? If he's walking down the street for several blocks and he discovers another man going in the same direction, he concentrates on that man. He doesn't take his mind away from that man. He prays for him.

And then, invariably, Frank Laubach says, somewhere the man turns around, and their eyes meet, and when that man's eyes meet the eyes of Frank Laubach, he meets the eyes of a saint--radiant--beatific.....and at the moment their eyes meet, Frank Laubach simply says--

"Can I help you?" Can I help you? - - CIHYU

...that's what he had branded his strategy.

He's riding in a bus---it's the person in front of him, across the aisle....

...on a train....on an airplane....

...it's an amazing thing to discover how much good he has been able to do for people simply because he says to his Heavenly Father,

"Let someone's need be met this day through me.")

Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, give I you."
The surprising thing about life is this--that God has given enough to every single one of us, that's there's always enough left over in our own way by which to meet the need of somebody else. Wherever there is a person who has any love at all in his heart, he always has enough by which to begin....

.. love always has enough by which to begin to meet another person's need....

I shan't attempt to prepare a prescription for you today, but I'm inclined to think that before the sun sets, before darkness settles, there is a need in someone's life that you could meet....

the writing of a letter....

a call on the telephone....

it's surprising the number of people who are getting older and older and older...and sometimes, maybe today, the thing that they might need most would be someone just to knock at their door and come in and sit down and just visit....a bit of the outside world that comes to them---and this could be the basic need in their life.

Anyone could preach this part of the sermon.....anyone.

But I am constrained to remind you the part that only the one who loves the Lord Jesus Christ can say now.

The most important single need in any person's life is Jesus Christ....

the need to receive Christ....the need to know Christ

All of us have this need.

And when you can't give anything else, a Christian always has this to give-- something of the spirit of Christ....something of the love of Christ....something of the hope of Christ. Maybe you haven't traveled very far along the Christian road,

but you have enough by which to begin, and it's the most precious thing that a Christian can share.

(I must close now, by telling you something about Dwight L. Moody, an evangelist of another generation. He had preached what he thought was a powerful sermon--aimed, geared, straight for the souls of men....

he was a "straight-shooter for souls"

...and on the platform was a very fastidious gentleman, who, when the sermon was finished, came up to Dwight L. Moody and said, "Sir, I wish to inform you that in your sermon you had eleven grammatical errors." Dwight L. Moody said, "I believe everything that you tell me. I don't doubt it a bit. You see, I never had much of an education....but I'll tell you one thing--that while I wish I had more, I've tried to make the best use of what I have had, and I'm using it in the name of Jesus. By the way, sir, would you be good enough to tell me what you're doing with yours?"

Others may have much more, whatever it may be, but God doesn't hold us responsible for what they have....

God holds us responsible for what we may have.

And then Peter said...."Silver and gold I don't have--I wish I did, perhaps....

but such as I have, give I thee: in the
name of Jesus Christ rise up and walk.")

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

- - from Interpreters' Bible

"Peter had something that would not keep. Some things will keep - - like stones and diamonds. Some things can be preserved and pickled. But the real things in life cannot be kept. Try to keep love and watch it turn to lust. Try to keep peace to yourself and see it degenerate into passivity. Try to keep money and watch it change into mammon. Try to keep beauty and you become a mummy. Keep a vision and you become a visionary. Try to keep Christ and you become a bigot. Peter could not keep the precious gift of life in Christ. He could only give it away. Like Peter, everyone has something that will not keep. - - "

"THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE"
(Acts 2:41-47)

This sermon is a continuation in the series based upon passages from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. It bears the title, "The Christian Way of Life;" and there is more than one verse that serves as the basis for today's sermon. Let me read, however, only the 42nd verse of this second chapter of the Book of the Acts:

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

Now you really can't appreciate that verse unless you see it in its relationship to the verse that precedes it and its relationship to the verses that follow. The verse that precedes it simply says that three thousand people were added to the church roll. The verses that follow this 42nd verse tell the kind of life that these people lived, once they became members of the Family of God which is the Christian Church.

There are always two questions, I think, that are asked whenever an evangelistic campaign is being conducted. The first question is:

"How many converts do you think we'll get?"

..and the second question that comes very properly:

"Of the converts that we get, how many do you think will stick?"

Ever since I was graduated from Seminary I have been an avid reader of certain British periodicals; and I remember reading one of them in particular, when Billy Graham was conducting a campaign over there. This one periodical wasn't too sympathetic to Billy Graham's campaign, and they kept harping on this one theme - - "they won't stick....they won't stick....they won't stick...." This is the question, of course, that's always asked.

At the end of the year we report to the Maryland Synod, and through the Maryland Synod we report to the United Lutheran Church in America, the number of people who have been received into this congregation in the course of the year. And there are other pastors who note our record here at Saint Luke Church...and one of the questions they often ask is this--

..how much leakage do you get?

..how many of them stray?

I once knew a wit who used to say--"You preachers don't talk enough about the two doors of the church. You're always talking about the open door, encouraging people to come in.....but I don't think you talk enough about the back door, through which some people seem to slip away..."

...well this is the kind of thing, you see, that's always plaguing the Christian Church. Not--how many converts can you get?

but--how many of them might last?

and --what happens to them after they become members?

I can't begin to tell you how great the joy is in my heart when I reckon with this passage of Scripture. I want to read, now, the two verses together. Listen carefully, please....

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized:
and the same day there were added unto them about three
thousand souls.
And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine
and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

As wonderful as that! They became members of the Christian congregation and they continued steadfastly. They had a way of life of which they were part, and in which they remained! once they became members of the Family of God which is the Christian Church.

John A. Hutton, an able preacher of a generation ago, once wrote a grand little book entitled, "As At The First," and the thesis of that grand little book

is this.....

that the early Christians had something that we don't have today.

..they had a way of life that isn't always characteristic of

Christian congregations in the 19th and 20th centuries...

And he said what we ought to do is to go back and study what

the Christian Church was like "as at the first."

This is what this study of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles has done for me.

In the preparation of this series of sermons throughout this year of 1961-62, it's

as though in preparing each sermon I'm opening a door and becoming a part of the early Christian Church; and what delight I know in my soul when I read these words..

....once they became members of the Family of God, they

continued.....steadfastly

...they participated in a way of life.

Now you and I do well to evaluate that way of life....

what was it like?....

how did they live?....

what were the characteristics?...

The first characteristic is this:

They were a people who went on studying -- always trying to

learn more about the doctrines of the church.

This is the way it's put--"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' teachings"

I don't know where we ever allowed it to happen, but there are some people who unconsciously submit to the fact that once you're confirmed, you've done all the studying that you need to do in the Christian religion! You have been exposed to Luther's Catechism, we Lutherans in particular--we've covered the five general areas ---and that's it! This is not as it ought to be.

A Christian ought always to be studying the basic teachings of the Christian religion...and one of the outstanding characteristics of their way of life was this--

that it was forever doctrinal--they knew what Christians believe.....

...if they had a child baptized, they knew why their child was being baptized---not just something that was being done
...when they came to receive the Holy Communion, if someone on the outside would have said "What happened when you went to church last night?"--and then they would explain how they took Bread and they took the Cup...he'd say, "What does that mean?"and they would be able to put into words what happens when a person takes the Bread and the Cup.

...they could give intelligent answers to the basic tenets of the Christian religion.

This the contemporary Christian isn't always able to do.

Take this wonderful thing that we cherish---belief in a personal God.

Ask many Christians.....what is your God like?

..how do you know God loves you?

..how do you know God is your Heavenly Father?

..how do you know you're being saved?

..why did Jesus Christ come into the world?

..how is it that the death of one man can work the miracle of redemption for all people?

These early Christians kept thinking about these things--talking about them.

An outstanding characteristic of the early Christian Church was that it was forever doctrinal---dealing again and over so often with the basic beliefs of the Christian religion.

I'm longing for the day in this agenda of things yet to be accomplished in Saint Luke Church, when we can have a lay school of theology---when you folks can come and sit at the feet of an able teacher, and study for yourselves, over and beyond

anything else that you've already received, the basic beliefs of the Christian Church. One of the very precious things about Saint Luke Church right now is the fact that all of you who have come into membership in this congregation in recent years have attended those New Member Group sessions, in which you find yourselves stimulated and challenged anew by what are the basic beliefs of the church. When the church was young this was part of their way of life. They kept talking about the doctrines of the church.

This, too, was a characteristic of their way of life:

...that whenever they came together, they were aware of a fellowship.

..they had this glorious outgoing--one person to another.

There are those who say about many contemporary Christian congregations--

"Oh, we have a good program,

and we have a fine church plant...

and we have good services of worship.....

...but, oh, if we only had more fellowship!"

They say it isn't easy with multiple services. You perchance come at 9:30, another congregation comes at 8:30--another congregation comes at 11:00....you live in Montgomery County, some of our members live in Prince George's, some live in Silver Spring, some live in Ashton--Bethesda--Fairfax, Virginia. How can you have fellowship? We haven't one room where all of us could come together at one time! And even if we would schedule one event, it's absolutely realistic to believe that not all of you would be interested, and you couldn't even have fellowship on that basis.

We have a neighbor, by the way, of Saint Luke Church, who doesn't go to church anywhere. One day she and I met, and she introduced herself as a neighbor. And she took all of us to task--at least she thought she was doing it...and I resent very much the joy that she knew.....she said, "What's wrong with your people over there?

I see them coming out the red doors--I see them walking down the path...they just don't talk to each other! Each one gets out of church and goes! goes! goes! I don't think you have much fellowship over there." Those were her words.

It doesn't bother me any more. Honestly it doesn't. Because I don't put too much stock in the kind of fellowship that comes just by a "hello." You don't get fellowship just by asking people to smile at each other....by forcing this kind of thing. And incidentally, I've waited about a year now, to tell you about this lady. You just don't force fellowship.

I get bulletins from other congregations. Some of them have had very informal services....and somewhere in the order of the day they have...

...the Ministry of Giving

...the Ministry of Prayer

and they have ---- ...the Ministry of Fellowship

and at that precise point in the service, after the announcements are made, everybody gets up and shakes hands with the person alongside of him, bids him the time of the day, says how glad he is to see him, and then they sit down...

...as though you can have the Ministry of Fellowship in capsule fashion--in one precise moment--as though this would do it.

The early Christian Church had fellowship, but they didn't get fellowship because they forced it, or because it happened to be a kind of superficial gesture. The early Christian Church had fellowship in depth. The kind of fellowship that was expressed because every single person who came to church knew himself as a child of God - - the recipient of grace through Jesus Christ - - the object of His work of Redemption. He knew that this had happened to him. And when he looked at anybody else in church, he wanted to think that this had happened to the person alongside of him, too. The fellowship that they had was the fellowship that was born of a common

experience. Each one knew Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour.

....the atmosphere, the character of this service of worship in Saint Luke Church could be transformed immediately if every single one of us in this congregation right now would be possessed by the grand notion that the person alongside of him...the person in front of him...the person behind him--like me--is a child of God!--has been exposed to God's Grace....and knows Jesus Christ as his Redeemer....

...and when you think this about me and I think this about you, something's going to happen. There's a radiance...
...there's a warmth of soul....

...this is fellowship, and you can't force it
...and it's going to be present only as people individually know that this has happened to them, then collectively it will have its own rightful expression.)

When the church was young, their Christian religion was a way of life....

...characterized by fellowship

...characterized by concern for the doctrines of the church

...characterized by their concern for worship - - they came together regularly

- - and when they came together they shared the common meal--the Holy Communion

...they were a brother and a sister, one with each other, when they came to receive the Sacrament.

The fourth characteristic of the early Church was this: it was always a church where something wonderful was happening. You read these six verses for yourself, Acts 2:41-47, and somewhere in those six verses you'll read that miracles were being performed, great things were occurring. For the Christian, as a way of

life, God is not someone who did everything that He wanted to do in the distant past. God is at work right now, and especially through Christians.

And the last characteristic I have to tell you about them is - - they had a winsomeness. People looked upon them favorably and kindly. They had a grace about them. That's what the Bible says!

And they also had this characteristic - - the continuing interest in the basic needs of other people. They even went so far, mark you, to sell everything that they had and had a common treasury. Now be careful, immediately you mark this off as the world's first experiment in communism that failed, and you laugh at the whole notion. Please don't laugh at it. I'm not talking about sharing one's goods in a central treasury. I'm talking about the fact that when the church was young, the people were enough interested in each other, that when the service of worship was over they did not say to themselves, "Whatever happens to you now in the course of the week until we meet again shall be your business, not mine." They were a sharing people.....

.....And if someone in their Family of God became lonely during the course of the week, it was a member of the Christian congregation who went to visit that lonely person.....

.....if a member of that Family of God was prone to go off the deep end in the course of the week, it was a member of that Christian congregation who went and did his best to minister to the need of that person.....

This was a characteristic when the church was young.

They had a continuing interest in the needs of each other.

There are those who believe that the Christian Church has never been as she was once upon a time. And if ever she is to have favor in God's sight, then she has to go back and capture something of the spirit - - something of the way of life
.....let me read it for you now, all over again:

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.
And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.
And all that believed were together, and had all things common;
And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.
And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.
Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

This, beloved, is the stock from which we have stemmed.

This is what the church once was.

This is the way of life she should have today.

Let us see if these can't become and remain the characteristics of this congregation.

* * * *

"THOSE DEADLY SINS - PRIDE"

The sermon series this Lent in Saint Luke Church will be based upon the theme of "These Deadly Sins." The subject for today is the sin of pride.

For one reason or another, just why I'm not certain, the word 'sin' has dropped from the vocabulary of many people. Things that people do that may not be right or proper we easily refer to as nasty, mean, unkind, not very gracious. Our grandparents and their parents before them often referred to misconduct and misbehavior as something that was downright wicked, shameful-- --"Don't do that--that's sinful."

(It could be a sad commentary upon our generation that the word sin is so easily forgotten. The Christian Church, however, for the most part, clings tenaciously to the fact that word should remain in our vocabulary, for the simple reason that you can't possibly appreciate the meaning of saviourhood unless you recognize the meaning of sin. For Jesus Christ came into the world to save us from our sins, and how can you know what it is to have a saviour if you don't know what your sins are from which you need to be saved? Sins is sin in the sight of God, there's no question about it, but there are some sins, so it would appear, that are far more heinous than others, if you please, far more deadly.)

Now this whole matter of sin began a long, long time ago. In fact, you can go back to the very, very beginning, to a man called Adam and to a woman called Eve. Day after day God made the world, in His plan, a portion of it in a particular period of time. And after He finished creating this thing and finished creating that, it would seem to me that He walked back from it, took a good long look, and day after day, period after period of time, He said, "This is good.... ...this is good."

And the crowning glory of His created work was when He made man. And to man He said.....

"It's yours. I made it, but I'm placing you in it. Enjoy it....

..make the most of it. But because I made the world for your sake, there's one thing I want you to remember among other things---there's one thing you are not to do....."

....and God went away.

(Man, left to himself, decided that even though God shook His head and raised His finger and said "No" ...man said, "We'll do it our way."

And ever since man has been saying, "We'll do it our way", ever since man has ignored what God has requested, we've had all kinds of trouble, all kinds of difficulty....

...and when man said, "We'll do it our way" he committed the sin of pride.

...for what is pride, except to have more confidence in your way?

what is pride except to prefer your way of doing something?

what is pride, except to think that your way is best?

...it all happened a long time ago.)

The Lutheran Church, as one branch of the Christian Church, has gone on talking about sin. In fact, every time you come back to church, every time you come to worship in a Lutheran congregation, you're required to begin at that point. The first five minutes in our liturgy we concern ourselves that in the sight of God we're sinners....."Here we are again, God. We were here last week, but with same old pack of sins. The good that we intended to do last week we didn't quite get done, and the full measure of pardon that we took to our hearts on Ash Wednesday, when we knelt before the altar, we haven't fully used in the proper sense...."

"Those Deadly Sins - Pride" (3)

And if you're not inclined to think that way about yourself, the church makes it its business to ask you to think that way....

".....we poor sinners confess unto thee, that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against thee by thought, word, and deed....."

The church goes on saying there is such a thing as sin.

The church goes on saying it against a multitude of voices that says there is no such thing.

The pseudo-science of our world is properly taken to task by a wit who wrote this satire:

"Seven deadly sins of old
The life tried to fix,
Proud stood surety for lust,
Then there were six.

Six deadly sins danced
A brisk satanic jive,
Strachey banished gluttony,
Then there were five.

Five deadly sins pursued
Their soul-seducing war,
Covetousness? Good for business!
Then there were four.

Four deadly sins bestrode
The world with devilish glee,
Envy? Who? There's no one left.
Then there were three.

Three deadly sins planned
What they could do.
Sloth--it's lack of vitamins!
Then there were two.

Two deadly sins enjoyed
A sport of fiendish fun.
The dollar loan abolished pride,
Then there was one.

One deadly sin!
By Beelzebub! the last!
Anger? Simply gland secretion!
Sinner--danger's past!"

This is part of the generation in which we live--in which sin has been explained away. No matter how high regard we may have for certain men and women of much learning, we have to be very careful of what they tell us.

(Take the socialist as an example.....

...the socialist is inclined to think that man is the way he is because of the environment in which he lives.....we tear down the slums--we give them a better house in which to live....
...but the socialist cannot treat a man's heart - - and out of the heart are the issues of life)

(the geneticist says.....

...you are what you are because your grandfather was the way your grandfather was--it's all in the genes!
...well the sins of our grandfathers may be visited upon us, and our grandfathers may be held responsible, to a degree, for what we become, these grandchildren of his....
...but it doesn't mean that the grandchild has to remain as his grandfather was!)

(the psychiatrist says....

...the trouble is that you don't know yourself. You're just a tangle of mixed-up emotions. Come to me and together we'll try to untangle you...together we'll try to see what's wrong, or better still, I will help you to find out for yourself what is wrong.....
...well-intentioned as the psychiatrist may be, this is about as far as he can go. It is never enough just for a man to find out what's wrong. Motivation has been part of the picture.....a man's willingness to turn himself around from the point at which he's found himself, and to begin anew.)

(then there's the educator and the people who follow in his train....

...if only we could get people to learn certain things--if only we could increase their knowledge. The world is the way it is because of lack of knowledge, lack of learning, even lack of wisdom..but there is no fool, there is no sinner, like an educated man. ...education is not enough.) and yet you and I are part of a generation that has been reaching here and reaching there, as though this were the answer.

We must remain forever grateful for what psychiatry can do.

We must remain forever grateful for what physiology can do---whatever any of these sciences can do.

But the church, we must remember, keeps saying that this is not enough...

...this is not enough. The heart of man is stained by sin.

The church says...

...we must talk about such things as conversion

...we must talk about such things as repentance

...and if conversion and repentance are to have any meaning,

then we must reckon with the terrible, black, austere fact of sin.

And what is sin? You may read the pages of the Bible. The Bible is filled with sin because the Bible is filled with the deeds of men. The Bible also talks about a God who can do something with a man's sin. He can even take it away! ...and page after page has Exhibit A where this has happened.

What is sin?

...there are those who say it's ignorance

...there are those who say it's immaturity

...there are those who say it's disobedience

...sin may be all of these.

Today we want to talk about one kind of sin in particular--the sin which is called pride.....

...and what is pride, but man's endeavor to think more of himself and the things that he would say belonged to him, as over against anything else...

...sin, the sin of pride, is man thinking more of himself than he thinks of God....

...the sin of pride is man always underlining one personal possessive pronoun - - my

...my way....my desire....my intention

It raises its ugly head in three different directions.

When a man looks at something, he says, "This is mine."

....Jesus told the story of a man who had a number of barns, many possessions.

"What shall I do? Business has been so good--where can I store the things that are mine?"

...Jesus condemned that man--not because he had prospered, but because in the face of that prosperity he made too much of the pride of possession....

...that eternal accent---"my bins....my barns....my possessions"

Whatever the degree may be by which God can catch the accent in your voice by which you and I underline that personal possessive pronoun "my", you and I are guilty of the sin of pride. It raises its ugly head when we think about things.

It raises its ugly head when we think about people.

We have a way, you see, of calling people ours.

Parents have a way of calling children theirs and never releasing the hold.

Parents have a way of being overly possessive, and it's indicated sometimes when they superimpose upon their children their image of what they were at their age.

...they have a way of...

....and they won't think of their being anything else except the image that they have of them.

A teenager will never call it by name, but this is a besetting sin, too.

....his desire to have life his way

".....I want to do what I want to do...."

...teenagers have been known to talk like that--they've been known to think that way.to rebel against authority--to rebel against parents, just because they want to have their way. And what is this but the sin of pride---the accent my way!

...Husbands have a way of treating their wives, sometimes this way...

..."Our home is to be run my way!..."

...Wives have a way of treating their husbands that way....

..."Our life is to be run my way...."

...Foremen have a way of doing this with those who are under them
in this whole matter of inter-personal relationship....

..."I'm the boss - - my way"

This ugly head of pride is raised when a man talks about possessions that he calls mine.....

It's raised when a man talks about people, and the accent's mine.....

It's raised when a man talks about his own soul....

"My soul, God.....mine to do with as I see fit!

...my life to live as I see it

...the satisfaction of my own desires...."

This is the sin of pride--to always say my.....my.....my

What have we, says a passage of Scripture, that we have not received? God is the Giver. What does any man have that he can really call his own except his sins?

....Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a

Pharisee and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood

thus and prayed with himself, "O God, I thank thee
that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust
adulterers, or even as this publican".....

...now he's underlining his behavior--my way of life
"I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that
I possess...."

And the publican standing afar off would not so much
as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote his hands
upon his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me, a
sinner."

...the Pharisee had everything, and was proud of it.

The only thing the publican had was his sin, and he wanted to get rid of it.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified,
rather than the other. For everyone that exalteth
himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself
shall be exalted.

The sin of pride is the most heinous of all.

And if you want to, you can recognize it more easily than any other sin,
because it's always tied up with that sinful personal possessive pronoun....my.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

March 18, 1962

"THOSE DEADLY SINS - - AVARICE"

The sermons these Sunday mornings during Lent are based upon the general theme, "Those Deadly Sins." Avarice is the subject of today's sermon.

(In William Saroyan's play, "The Time of our Lives" there are two characters in a saloon. The one seems to be in deep thought. He looks round about at all the other people in the tavern and then he says, "Look at us. Look at every one of us. We're in a wonderful world, and we're surrounded with a lot of wonderful things, but you know what? -- we're crazy--every one of us! For, being placed in this wonderful world, and surrounded with a lot of wonderful things, we're not satisfied!" The indictment made by the chap in the saloon is an indictment that might hold against every one of us.

For we, too, find ourselves in a wonderful world. In fact, as someone has observed, the best possible world. And who among us would not admit that he, too, has found in life many wonderful things...yet we have had our moments, haven't we, perhaps far too frequently than they ought to be, when we are unsatisfied. We wish we had something more. And we permit ourselves to believe that we'd be a lot happier, we'd be a lot better, if only we had something more...

...that other house in the country, perchance

....that second or third car..

...that extra bathroom - - - you name it--

--always, if only there were something more.)

A visitor went to Ft. Lauderdale in Florida, our Venice in North America. He was much impressed by his very clever guide. He was taking him around the some two hundred canals in that beautiful place, and as they went by one estate after another, he would make some comment. And as they passed this certain property he said, "Now this place, this belongs to Mr. So-and-so from Chicago. He lives here

about three months out of the year. But in Chicago he has a lovely place, too.
In Switzerland he has a very fine place.

Now, when you go behind, notice the patio back there? In the midst of that very fine patio he has a wonderful swimming pool...

In the driveway in the back there could be a Rolls Royce...

In the driveway in the front, you see the Cadillac...

.....In his stomach, he has ulcers."

The man who would have everything perhaps has lost his health in his vain attempt to hold onto everything, and what is more, to have a little bit more.

The sin of avarice is the besetting sin of many people. Why are people that way? Why are we greedy? (let's call it by its rightful name!) Why are we inclined to think that we never have quite enough? Why is it we go through life forever grasping--reaching for that which is beyond? It's as old as the human race.....

In Bible days Jesus told the story about a man who had arrived at that wonderful, wonderful place where his only concern was:

"How shall I build another barn to take care of everything
that I have, and I'll go on getting other things---if I
have to build another barn, I'll go on getting other
things....other things....other things....."

And Jesus said, "I have to say to that man--tonight your soul will be required of you! What then?"

....why is man greedy?

...why is he avaricious?

...why is he unsatisfied?

...there may be a number of reasons, and one is this:

- - he permits himself to believe that if only he had more things,
he would be happier.

This is one reason why, it seems to me, and I don't pose as a political

economist, but I think this is one reason why Communism will be falling into its own right some day....because it spreads, you see!

...because it's always promising people a parcel of land

..it's always going to take from someone who has

to give to someone who doesn't have

...and it gets more and more people within its grasp, you see, because down deep inside every human being has a desire to have something he can call his own! Men have a way of believing that if only they had these things, they could be happier.

Reinold Niebuhr in his "Nature and Destiny of Man" establishes the thesis which all of us have to respect....that while we may grasp for this thing and we may grasp for that thing, the time comes when no security is ever enough. It's a wit who says, when being told "You can't take it with you"--replies, "Well, then I won't go"...never realizing, of course, that he won't arrive there because it won't do him any good then. Men are avaricious, men are greedy, men remain unsatisfied, because they permit themselves the very foolish notion that if only they had this thing, then they would be happy. Men remain avaricious and greedy because they think that if they could have things, they would arrive. They'd have a certain status....

....the man who has the property in the country has the kind of status
that the man who only has one property doesn't have

...the man who has two or three automobiles has a kind of status that
the man who only has one automobile doesn't have

...the chap who is on one board of directors as over against another
board of directors and a third and a fourth has the kind of
status that the man who is only on one board of directors doesn't
have

...we are the generation of status-seekers, you see.

....if only we could be established, if only we could be entrenched, if only we could be respected because of the thing for which we happen to reach and then get--"and then I'll have more status if I can get something else!".....

(I find it increasingly helpful to remember John Wesley, who years ago had an income of 30 English pounds. In his day John Wesley decided that he would live on 28 pounds - - that isn't quite 80 dollars. When his income increased to the place where he had 40 pounds, he went on living on 28 pounds. And when his income became 60 pounds and 90 pounds and 120 pounds....he still went on living on 28 pounds. For John Wesley schooled himself that he would never arrive at that station in life where he would be dissatisfied because he couldn't maintain a standard of living that he felt he just had to have. He would discipline himself to be eternally grateful with the bare essentials. Men are greedy...men are avaricious... ..they remain unsatisfied...because they permit themselves to think, if only they had certain things, then they would be happy. It's the tyranny of things, you see, that curses man.....)

....Money, in itself, is not evil--you know that, of course you do!...and you have the Scriptural injunction that it's the love of money....

...this inordinate desire to have, to grasp, to claim....makes a man a prisoner of the very thing for which he reaches.

(Tolstoi tells of a chap who overnight discovered that he was the owner of a parcel of property. He had never had property before, and immediately there sets in this pride of possession...."This is mine!"

...and because he happens to have it, he has the inordinate desire, all at once, to have more.

...and a stranger comes to him, so Tolstoi tells it, and the stranger said--"Look round about you---do you see all of this land?"

...and greed-possessed, the chap says "Yes!"

...and the stranger says, "You can have it---all that you can cover in one day can

be yours! But at sundown you have to come back and report to me...and all the ground that you can cover in one day can be yours!"

....the man ran off like mad, obsessed with greed. He didn't even so much as say goodbye to his wife. He ran with a feverish pace. And as he ran he said to himself--"I'll make it six miles." And when he reached six miles--"I'll make it nine".... ..and when he got to nine he said, "I'll get to twelve."

.....someone saw this man running like mad, and offered him something to eat. He didn't even take time to eat....

.....someone saw the man in the mid-afternoon, in the heat of the day, and offered him a cup of cold water - - "Stop! Pause! Wait!" Relax!"he never so much as stopped---never so much as even saw the man....

....nearing sundown, he had covered fifteen square miles, which gave him, you see, sixty miles that he had to cover. He comes back just as the sun is setting. And as he reaches the stranger he collapses with fatal fatigue....dead.

And the stranger said, "I offered him all the ground that he could cover...how much ground can a man really cover? how much ground does a man really need? how much ground can a man really use?...."

...and the stranger with his eyes cast downward at the lifeless form simply says as he walks away....."Six feet by two.")

....nothing, perhaps, outside of the New Testament, condemns the sin of avarice quite as severely as Tolstoi's account of the avaricious peasant.

What's wrong with avarice? There are several things that are wrong with avarice. One is that it makes a man unhappy with his present lot. God wants us to be happy. When His Son was here on earth, He spoke the Beatitudes, outlining for man his blessed estate. God so designed the world, God so made the world, that man could be happy in this world. And God so has made the world that there's enough

for everybody. And God has so made the world that, for the most part, every man can satisfy his basic needs and wants. But when a person becomes avaricious, he is no longer satisfied with his present lot. This is the heinous aspect of all that's avaricious. God has an unsatisfied man on His hands.

What's wrong with avarice? It makes a man become very selfish. In his greed, in his desire to get, in his inordinate desire to possess, he forgets about everyone else.....

the avaricious one forgets his family....

the avaricious one forgets his health.....

the avaricious one forgets the needs of other people, round about
on every side.

What's wrong with avarice? It is a deadly sin.

...it guarantees a man the death of his soul.

It's Dostoevski who tells in one of his stories about the wicked woman who died. And because she lived the kind of life that she lived, there is only one condition for her left, and that was the state of hell. And hell for her was to go into a brink, into a lake...the Lake of the Damned.

...God, who goes on having concern for us, finds her in this saddest state. He says to one of His messengers, "I can't think of her being eternally damned. Angel, can't you find one good deed to her credit? Maybe this can be her salvation."

...and the angel begins to probe and to study--to examine her life from birth to the moment of death....and then he discovers that one day a beggar passed by her garden and this very wicked woman plucks from her garden an onion and gives it to the beggar!

....there's a smile on the face of God. This is good! This can be this woman's hope.

..."You take the onion. Hold it in front of her in this lake,
and when she grasps for it, you pull her out to safety...

...but if the onion should break, then she will be lost."

...the angel went, performed the designed task....the woman reaches for the onion, to be saved from the Lake of Death. She has a firm hold on it.

...the angel pulls and is just about to bring her to safety and salvation, when other sinners in the lake see what's happening. And two of them begin to grab onto her feet....and when she is aware of what's happening, she kicks with whatever strength she has, until she is free from them...

....and in doing so, she says to them--"This onion is mine! It's meant for my salvation, not yours!"...

....and when she says that, the onion breaks, and she's lost forever in the Lake of the Damned.)

This, you see, is what avarice can do to a person. Jesus condemned the sin of avarice on more than one count.

Now what is the antidote? The antidote is simply this: hunger and thirst for righteousness. This is the hunger and thirst which God can satisfy.

Don't let avarice become your besetting sin, my friend.

You don't have to go to hell.

Jesus Christ said...."Hunger and thirst after righteousness, and you

will be filled....you will be satisfied."

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as delivered)

March 25, 1962

"THOSE DEADLY SINS - LUST"

We consider today the third in the series of sermons based upon the general theme, "Those Deadly Sins." Let me say at once, it is not a safe thing to assume, just because you classify some sins as 'deadly sins', that other sins, in themselves, will not lead to the death of the soul. This is not a fair assumption to make. Just because some sins happen to be far more heinous than others, far more revolting and ugly, we may classify them in one category all by themselves; but any sin, committed often enough, can lead to the damnation of a soul, if forgiveness through Jesus Christ is not sought. Hell is arrived at just because somewhere, somehow, someone took the first step in that direction, no matter how small the step might have been.

NUREMBERG
(In "Judgment at Nuremburg" in the closing scene, the one-time Minister of Justice under the Nazi regime has asked for the American jurist to pay him a visit in his cell. The three American jurists had been at Nuremburg for some weeks and months...the trial, now, of the Nazis judges had been completed...the evidence had been presented--the terrible, terrible evidence from the concentration camps had been made known. The sentence is passed. Two of the three judges decide that they have no alternative---these men are guilty.

Because of the respect that the former Minister of Justice in the Nazi regime has in his mind and his spirit for the American jurist, he begs him to visit him in his cell. So the jurist comes. The judge and the prisoner meet eye to eye. Haunted by the grim evidence that was the net, the total result of all the defilement of human personality, the Minister of Justice under the Nazis said...."But I never knew it would end like this!" And you and I are prone to excuse it, for you and I think that we might have said the same thing, in the face of those circumstances. But the American jurist simply says, as he's about to leave, "The day you sentenced your

first man, and somehow you knew in your heart that what you were about to do was a violation of all the rules of human decency and respect for basic integrity of personality--the day you sentenced your first man--all of this began!" I say to you again, quickly, Hell is always arrived at because somewhere, somehow, someone took the first step in that direction. I say to you again, and it cannot be ignored, any sin, repeated often enough, and without the sinner making a plea for forgiveness, any sin can lead to the damnation of a soul.)

Today we consider in the series of the Deadly Sins, as Pope Gregory once classified seven of them, the sin of lust. Is it necessary that I explain what is meant by the sin of lust? It's basically self-love. It's basically my soul having no peace until I get what I want, and for the worst of all gratifications, the gratification of the flesh. And I profane my soul when I prostitute what could have been a noble experience in my endeavor to get it. Lust is always the ugliest of sins....

--there are those who say---you make too much of it. Man is man.

And man is of the flesh. You can't expect anything other than this.

And so there's a school of thought that maintains that if anyone ever points his finger at you and talks about the sin of lust, just ignore him...walk away from him...ignore the fact that there should be such a thing as the sin of lust. For man is of the flesh, and there isn't much that you can do about it. The animal in him is always going to have its ascendancy. Ignore any preaching to the contrary.

...there are those who think that way, there are those who talk that way, there are those who live on that basis.....

--then there are those who, when they consider the sin of lust, say you can't ignore it--you have to recognize it. And man, left to himself, gives vent to his animal passion. Recognize it, but in return, do this: repress it! keep holding it down!

...this I cannot recommend. It is not a safe thing to believe that you can always, by your own strength, hold down what is basically evil. God never made any man strong enough, able enough, by his own strength, to repress what is evil in his heart. And it's because every now and then you find people who permit themselves to believe that you can repress the sin of lust, you end up with a neurotic, the emotionally disturbed, the mentally ill....

--there are those who, when they talk about the sin of lust, say...sex is natural to man, so all that we have to do about it now, is to explain it. And so, thanks to the new education, we gather our boys and girls in the impressionable days of youth into a classroom, and certain people bring out diagrams and charts...they may even point to objects in a caseand if only somehow we can explain the regenerative organs of man, and we talk about it in the open---this is all that's necessary. Talk about it often enough, bring it out into the clear, and we'll have little, if any, problem at all.

...that would be quite all right if man were nothing more than an animal, or it could be quite all right if man were nothing more than spirit. But man is both! body and soul!..and for one reason or another we've never quite succeeded in talking to people about the sins of obesity by simply showing them a stomach! Explain isn't enough. Someone has said you can't use the analogy of a stomach and reproductive organs and expect people to understand the same thing. It's like talking about a rubber hose and a high tension wire. If you get confused with the use of rubber hose through which you want water to flow, well you might be able to control the damage that results with that...but to get confused with a high tension wire! is something entirely different. You can't rest your case simply by saying, when it comes to the sin of lust, when it comes to the sin of passion---when it comes to this whole business of sex---all you have to do is talk about it---explain it. To explain is never enough.....

--when you come to the sin of lust, to the sin which is sex, there is a school of thought that maintains....well, it's so understandable. Why get so excited about it?....perhaps, maybe we'd be better off if we'd learn how to excuse it.....

...the eternal triangle. Man meets woman under ideal circumstances. Man doesn't meet woman at the kitchen sink. Man does not meet woman when she's burdened by the trials and responsibilities of three, four, five children. Man meets her always on this glamorous date relationship. Then there's this whole matter of propinquity---this whole matter, perhaps --"maybe there is someone else who understands me better"....

....excuse it on this basis--try to understand.....

...in Dante's "The Divine Comedy" as Dante is in the Inferno, he's given the very special privilege of going around the different regions of hell, and on his trip through hell, you see, he's confronted with people who have been guilty of the seven deadly sins. And now he comes face to face in that particular area where those who are the damned because they've committed the sin of lust....and the two people with whom he's engaged in conversation are Francesca and Paolo. Francesca originally had been married to the brother of Paolo, Gian-cotti, who had been deformed. Paolo was younger, more attractive, better favored. And Dante asks the question, "What did you do?--- how did it come about that you committed the sin of lust?"...and Francesca admits that first there was the attraction of the person, then they reasoned to themselves---this is love---this is the real thing!...then it was - - adultery.

...attraction....the seeming love.....adultery

...and Dante is begging for more - - "Tell me more!"....

...and Francesca says, "It all began when we were talking, we were reading together about Lancelot and Guinevere--a pure thing, you see, and we thought that ours could be ^{unlike} ~~like~~ that"....so you might have her say.

...and Dante faints....faints because he has to recognize the fact that no matter how you excuse it, Francesca is still in hell!

...you can't excuse it, for the sin which is lust, while it may be guiltless, eventually leads, as someone has said, to the half-darkened cocktail lounge, to the room somewhere in the half-respectable motel, and invariably, to the transgression of God's law.

...ignore?

...repress?

...explain?

...excuse?

--the Christian tradition constantly shakes its head.

The Christian tradition says you must recognize--man is flesh.

The Christian tradition says you must also recognize that man is spirit.

And in this time of temptation, in this moment of seduction, it isn't so much that there's confused judgment, it isn't so much that there's the evidence of un-wisdom.....it's the fact that there is a transgression of God's law, and you cannot call it by any other name. This is what lust can lead to!

And that's why it's as heinous as all that!

Now, does the church simply say that this is the final thing to be said?

No. The church remembers that a long, long time ago a man by the name of the Apostle Paul, who wrestled with this thing....and the Apostle Paul says, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision to fulfill the lusts of the flesh."

give Jesus Christ the priority!.....

ask for His help!.....

ask to be cleansed by His grace.....

(The Christian church says there is only one answer to the sin of lust, and that is for the sinner to beg to be sanctified by Jesus Christ.

...to girls in the impressionable teenage period of their life I say with all the ardor of my soul---set your affection now, not on some glamorous Hollywood product ---set your affection on a woman called Mary, who in her chastity and her virginity, in her purity, became the handmaid of the Lord.

...to young men in the impressionable teenage period of their lives I say--take as your standard a man named Joseph, who with paternal devotion surrounded the Christ Child with a love that was pure because of what he had in his heart for Mary.

"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Make no provision for the flesh.")

(The classic illustration, of course, for this is Augustine, perhaps the best known of the church fathers, who lived a terrible life of a dissolute youth. In his "Confessions" he describes how, reading from this section of Romans, there came a complete revolution in his life. For months he had struggled helplessly against the power of passions which he could not control. The continued failure of his attempt to live a decent life had brought him to the verge of despair. He felt bound by the chains of his past sins. So in his "Confessions" he writes.....

"...and I continued my miserable complaining--how long, how long shall I go on saying, "Tomorrow, tomorrow"--why not now? Why not have an end to my uncleanness this very hour? Such things I said, weeping in the most bitter sorrow of my heart. And suddenly I heard a voice from some nearby house, "Take and read! Take and read!" Damping back the flood of my tears, I arose, interpreting the incident as quite certainly a divine command to open my book of Scriptures and read the passage to which I should open. So I was moved to return to the place where I was sitting, for I had put down the Apostle's book there when I arose. I snatched it up, opened it, and in silence read the passage on which

my eye soon fell:

'not in rioting and drunkenness, not in
chambering and wantonness, not in con-
tention and envy.

"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ,
and make no provision for the lusts of
the flesh."

I had no wish to read further, and I had no need. For
in that instant, with the very ending of the sentence,
it was as though a light of utter confidence shone in
my heart, and all the darkness of uncertainty vanished
away."

This is the recommendation of the Christian church:

You are by nature a sinner.

And again, and ever so often, there will be the desire to
satisfy the lusts of the flesh.

...you cannot conquer it by yourself.

Jesus Christ waits. Claim His love.

Claim His power.

Kierkegaard says...."Purity of heart is to will one thing---

to be possessed by the mind of Christ"

....and when one is possessed by the mind of Christ, a lot of other things of
lesser value lose their appeal, and herein is your hope and mine.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed from recording on tape.)

"THOSE DEADLY SINS - ANGER"

Today's sermon is the fourth in the series based upon the general theme "Those Deadly Sins." The subject for today's sermon is the sin of Anger. It's a salutary thing for a man to remember that once he may become a Christian, he just doesn't ordinarily have done with the "sinner" label. For the fact of life remains that you and I are sinners unto the very day that we die. We may come into a knowledge of God's redeeming love through Jesus Christ, and we may have an affection for Him that will bring strength to our souls, but we'll never completely have done with the fact that we are sinners.

How else can you explain this magnificent liturgy of the church--this liturgy which ushers us into the very presence of God every time we come to this place---you can hear the words now, can't you?...."we poor sinners confess unto Thee that we are by nature sinful and unclean and we have sinned against Thee by thought, word and deed"and the startling fact is that the only one who ever really says these words, who makes them a prayer from the depth of his soul, is the man who has had a genuine confrontation with Jesus Christ. The more we become aware of what God is, the more you and I know that God loves us, the less easy it is for us to get rid of the label "sinner." The sad fact remains that we are sinners to the very day that we die. We are being redeemed, we are on the way to Heaven, but we never travel perfectly.

The Apostle Paul wrote a number of letters to young churches. In the letter that he wrote to the Ephesians, he indicates that when a man becomes a Christian, however, he ought to try to get rid of some of his old sins. Like a man who gets a new coat, he ought to discard the old one, and wear the new one proudly and well. When a man becomes a follower of Jesus Christ, deliberately, he ought to say to him-

self...."now I'll get rid of some of those sins that so easily beset me before I knew Jesus Christ." And in that wonderful letter that he wrote to the Christians at Ephesus he begins naming some of the sins that a man ought to get rid of.

...one of the sins that he says a man should get rid of is the sin of telling untruths. A Christian should not deal in falsehoods....

....and then he goes on to talk about the sin of anger. It stopped me for a moment when I read that text, because it wasn't exactly what I had in mind when I came to prepare this sermon. You see, we are dealing with the deadly sins, and when Gregory, a pope of the Roman Catholic Church, decided to catalog some of the sins as far more deadly than others, he named seven, and one of those seven deadly sins is the sin of anger....and I was prepared, as I got ready to preach this sermon, and to write the introduction, that immediately I would launch out against the sin of anger....

...but when I read that 26th verse of the 4th chapter of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, I have had to change this whole introduction...because Paul says--

"Be angry"....

and I say to myself, "Paul, you're mistaken---to be angry is to sin. Can't I read that verse some other way?"

...but you can't tamper with Scripture--

Paul says, "Be angry" - - as though there is a kind of anger which is permitted the Christian...and Paul didn't simply end his sentence by saying "be angry" ---

--Paul says in that 26th verse of the 4th chapter of his letter to the Ephesians..."Be angry, but do not sin. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath, and don't give any opportunity to the devil."

...be angry? Is there a kind of anger for the Christian which is not sinful?

...and the answer is yes.

(...and maybe Paul Tillich is perfectly right when he says that part of the curse of our generation is that we believe too much in toleration. We are a people who oftentimes will tolerate anything--

--"you do what you want to do, and let me do what

I want to do, and I won't care whether what you want to do is good or bad, and don't you worry yourself by worrying about me, whether what I want to do is good or bad"

--Paul Tillich says the curse of our generation could be that we become too tolerant of people...that we don't know what it is to become infuriated by evil, as an example....that there ought to come a time in a man's life when he doesn't become righteously indignant.

There is a kind of anger which is permitted the Christian, but it's the right kind of anger. I'm glad I've had done with the notion of Jesus Christ, "gentle Jesus, meek and mild"---I no longer think of Him in that way. He is the gracious Christ, He is the considerate Christ, He is the sympathetic Christ...but God forbid that I should think of His Son as being so gentle, so meek and so mild that He is spineless.

...a picture of Jesus Christ that none of us ought ever to forget is the picture of Christ who is terribly and majestically angry....how He went into the temple and even fashioned for Himself a whip, that He might drive from the temple the money-changers who had defiled the temple and were victimizing innocent worshippers. This is the picture of an indignant Christ that you ought not to forget...

...it is the infuriated Christ, who became enangered by a group of church people who told Him He had no right to heal a man on the Sabbath Day--so rigidly did they want to adhere to their orthodoxy...and allow this man to remain in his affliction

tion and in his pain. He wasn't angry at them just because they were criticizing Him--but He was indignant by the fact that they could stand there and allow someone who was innocent to suffer....

...think you for a single minute that He wasn't indignant and angered by those who came and caught the woman in the act of adultery, when He knew so well how they were casting scorn upon her when in their hearts He knew full well the evil that possessed them.....

...there is a Christ who is not tolerant.

Perhaps the strength of your soul, my friend, can be determined by the things that make you angry.

(F. W. Robertson was at one time one of England's finest preachers. And in his diary he tells how he was possessed with white-hot anger when on a certain street corner he saw a man about to lay the bait for a sweet, innocent girl, and to deliberately lead her in the direction of hell. Who can be tolerant of such a thing like that?)

..."Be angry" says the Apostle Paul, but it must be the right kind of anger...

"Be angry" says the Apostle Paul, "but do not sin"

...because there is a kind of anger that can lead to sin, and this is the kind of anger that you and I must consider right now: the kind of anger, when in a moment of blind passion a man allows the present moment to dictate his action, which in itself could be so terribly destructive. Someone has said, and I think rightly so, that the evil which is anger lies in the fact that anger always wants to destroy....

"I'll crush you to bits - - "

"I'll get you if it's the last thing that I do - - "

...this is the language, this is the intent, of an angry man.

(in "West Side Story" there is a very precious episode when Maria, the personification of all that is sweet and pure, meets her lover for the first time.... Tony, who had permitted himself to believe that some day it was going to happen, and it happens that night. The sweetness, the purity, the innocence of love is there. Maria learns that her brother, who is the leader of a gang, is going to meet a rival gang, and Maria in her innocence pleads with Tony to stop it. "You can do it. I beg you. It can't go on"--as much as to say, "It's an evil thing, Tony, it's an evil thing."

...and somewhere down deep inside yourself you begin to feel good---

this is wonderful--here are two people possessed by the notion

that evil should not be allowed to have its moment....

...and Tony, inspired by his love for Maria and by her love for him, decides to do what he can to stop the fight. In its beginning stage, it seems as though he could be successful, and you feel encouraged--something grand and noble about this young man....but then there comes this terrible moment when he loses all sense of control, and because one boy has been killed, possessed by anger, infuriated, blindly he kills the leader of the rival gang, who is Maria's brother. All now is lost--so it would seem.

This is what happens when one is possessed by anger. And the evil which is anger is blind...

...blind to the ultimate consequences--blind to all to which it will lead--blind to all those who become innocently involved.

This is the evil which is anger...it is blind to everything beyond the demand of the present moment.)

This is the evil which is anger...it is pure selfishness..."for this one moment, and this moment alone, I will think only of myself and my reaction, and nothing--absolutely nothing, is going to stop me now....this is the evil which is anger.

...I'm in an elevator--it's crowded...someone pushes me--in anger I push back---no one is going to push me around....and for one moment at least, when anger is in control, I think only, and only of myself and my hurt feelings.....this is the evil which is anger, because it's so selfish....

....this is the evil which anger because it is so blind

....this is the evil which is anger because it is destructive...

...I walk into a darkened room--I stub my toe...my immediate reaction with whatever strength remains is to kick that chair to bits--to destroy.

....this is the evil which is anger because it's always the urge to destroy, and once a person becomes obsessed by it, he becomes aggressively destructive and will brook no opposition.

What does one have to say, then, to the evil which is anger? Does he simply admit that it exists, and walk his way? No. One begins at the place where the Apostle Paul began. Paul says....

"Name your sins, and then say to yourself, I'll
try to have done with them"

Now, how do you have done with the evil which is anger? Again and again you look at it and see what its results will lead to. And then you set your affection upon something else...

..in a sober moment of reflection I will say to myself, "I never intended to hurt that person, but in anger I did. In anger I do things, in anger I say things, and the hurt may remain"

That 's why the Apostle Paul says...

"Let not the sun go down upon your wrath" -- if
you give way to uncontrolled anger, then that
very same day, attempt reconciliation. This is

the Christian grace, and the longer you put off reconciliation,
the harder it is to ever attempt reconciliation again.

I have lived long enough to see the evil which is anger continue from
one generation to another; and the children go on talking about "what so-and-so
did to grandfather, and grandfather never forgave him, nor will I!"

...says the Apostle Paul

"Let not the sun go down upon your wrath."

The last thing to be said about the evil which is anger is this: that
it's such a foolish thing. What a fool I am to react in anger, because sometimes
when I become enangered, I am simply playing into the hands of those who delight
in making me angry. In one of the tales of Sinbad there is an account of some
people who wanted to get the cocoanuts from the palm tree. They had no ladder
to scale the tree, so what did they do? They picked up rocks and stones and they
started throwing, hoping perchance that they might hit a cocoanut and down it
would come. But the monkeys in the tree, thinking that the stones and the rocks
are being thrown at them, infuriated, reach for the cocoanuts and throw them down.
...anger is not only a diabolical thing, it's such a foolish thing.

..."Be angry" says the Apostle Paul,

but do not sin, because when you become angry,
you just give another opportunity to the devil
to make a fool out of you

There is no greater delight in the soul of Satan--than to make a fool
out of you. That's why anger is so damnable.

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded.)

April 8, 1962

"THOSE DEADLY SINS - ENVY"

Today's sermon is the last in the series based upon the general theme, "Those Deadly Sins" and as you note from the bulletin, the subject for today's sermon is the sin of ENVY; and as a text, from First Peter, the second chapter, the first verse:

"So put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander. Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation; for you have tasted the kindness of the Lord."

The Apostle Peter, kin to the great Apostle Paul, in complete agreement, that once a man becomes a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, he ought deliberately to have done with his old sins. It is true, and it might become a necessary thing for you to remember it, that even though you are encountered by Jesus Christ and you claim Him as your Lord and Saviour, you remain a sinner to the very day that you die. But once you have been encountered by Jesus Christ, sin should not have the great appeal that it once had for you; and once you have been encountered by Jesus Christ, you ought to be so strengthened and sustained that you can fight against the devil with far greater vigor. The Apostle Paul said that when a man becomes a Christian he ought to throw off his old sins like a man who gets a new coat, gets rid of the old one. The Apostle Peter, striking the very same note, says that a man should deliberately put away all malice, guile, insincerity, envy and slander.

If this series on the deadly sins has accomplished any purpose at all, it perchance has done this for some of us---it has forced us to call certain sins by name, and somehow to get an image of ourselves, as Sunday by Sunday we have talked about the most heinous of the sins. It's a contemporary French film, perhaps, that gives us some indication of what ought to happen in our lives, too. I don't recommend most of it, but the scene opens in this manner.....a character is standing in front of a series

of booths on a Parisian street. And he simply shouts out "Everybody sins! Everybody sins! Step right up, brother, and take a look at your own."and then he is given several balls, and he has a chance to throw them at a mannequin...and when the mannequin, one for each of the seven deadly sins, falls, there is a portrayal, a real-life drama, of that particular sin.....

...who knows, my friend, has that been happening for you? It's been happening for me--as Sunday by Sunday I take a good long look at another of the ugly sins, and I see something of the reflection of my own soul.

It's a salutary thing for a man, when he goes to bed at night, to talk about his sins. Oh, don't say to yourself--Pastor, don't recommend that--I have trouble enough sleeping as it is.....but maybe this is the thing that we ought to do....

call our sins by name....

see them in their stark reality....

...and then there might come to us the peace of God that
belongs to the forgiven.

But as long as a man refuses to recognize himself as a sinner...as long as he is unwilling to call them by name, he goes through life forever shadow-boxing with his soul. And this is not a good thing.

I am constrained to admit that perhaps in the Roman Catholic confessional there is something that I have to respect. While I would not recommend it to you generally, according to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, at least once a year a man must make confession through the priest. And when he enters the confessional booth, he does not simply say, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned".....

....it's not a good thing for a man to crawl into bed even saying to himself, even as he echoes his prayer to God--"Forgive me all my sins this day, for Jesus' sake, Amen"...we need

"Those Deadly Sins - Envy" (3)

something more than blanket coverage for all our sins.....

...in the confessional booth the priest will say to a man--"Name your sins."

You and I ought to do that more frequently. Instead of saying, "O God, forgive me all my sins",

review the day--and if you can find that moment when you were

greedy, admit that you were greedy, and call it greediness...

review the day--and if in your relationship with a person you were

envious, admit that you were envious.....

if in the course of the day you gave way to a lustful desire,

admit that you were lustful....

...for who knows, the thing that God requires first from any man is that he be completely honest---honest not only with himself, but honest with his God...and this God may require, not for His sake, for God searches the mind of man and God knows your heart...but for your sake God may require this honesty in the admission of your sin. So Sunday by Sunday we have been dealing with these sins.

We come now to the last in the series that we'll consider---the sin of envy. And would you believe me if I were to tell you that if by some miracle of grace you and I could have done with every sin, the last sin to die, methinks, would be the sin of envy....

I think God in His own way would have a way of breaking my pride,

and causing me to become humble. There's enough in the pressure of life that this is going to happen eventually, and well it should...and where is the man who can die a proud man?...life has its own way of taking care of this....

and if I could conquer the sin of greed, and have done with my avaricious nature....

have done with any lustful desire....

"Those Deadly Sins - Envy" (4)

and if I could conquer my temper, and get rid of anger....

...the last sin to stalk me, the last sin to hold me, as long as there might be just one other person around, would be the sin of envy.

Are you aware of the fact, my friend, that of all the sins that drove the nails in the cross, the sin that drove the nails most fiercely, and the sin most directly related to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the sin of envy. It's a matter of Scriptural record---you can find it recorded in the 27th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, when the Gospel writer says, "It was for envy that they had delivered Jesus to be crucified."

(Are you aware of the fact, my friend, that the sin that almost wrecked (and I use the word advisedly)--the sin that almost wrecked the early Christian Church was the sin of envy? They all got along beautifully, until suddenly one church member discovered that there was another church member who seemed to have an edge on him...and every time they sat down at a church meeting the issue would rise or fall, according to the degree that these people were possessed by the envious nature that characterized them. Every now and then in a letter that Paul wrote he begs these people to get envy out of their system. Why, it even crept into the picture when our Blessed Lord only had twelve disciples...and there was a mother with an envious nature who came and asked Jesus Christ if it wouldn't be possible for two of her sons to have a position over and above anybody else. So great is the sin of envy! - - the last sin to die.

Why is it so heinous? Why so grievous? I'll tell you why. The sin of envy invariably leads to the sin of hatred. And hate is the cancer of the heart. James Fraser has written: - -

"I do not fear
To walk the lonely road
Which leads far out into the
 sullen night.
Nor do
I fear the rebel, wind-tossed
Sea that stretches onward, far,

Beyond the might of human hands
Or human loves. It is the
Brooding, sharp-thorned discontent
I fear, the nagging days without
A sound of song - - It is
The hate-touched soul I dread,
The joyless heart; the unhappy
Faces in the streets; the
Smouldering fires of unforgiven
Slights. These do I fear. Not
Night, nor surging seas, nor
Rebel winds, but hearts unlovely
And unloved."

This is why envy is so grievous: it eventually leads to hate. And hate is the worst thing that can happen to the human heart. Who is it that has written?--
I wish I could recite the words for you now..."anything, God, but hate."

For clarification in this sermon, let us ask ourselves, now, just what is envy? Some of the medieval writers are quite helpful on this point. Spenser in his FAERIE QUEENE pictures each of the deadly sins. First he talks about pride, now he talks about envy....

"And next to him malicious Envy rode,
Upon a ravenous wolf, and still did chaw
Between his cankered teeth a venomous toad,
That all the poison ran about his jaw,
But inwardly he chewed his own maw,
And neighbor's wealth, that made him ever sad;
For death it was when any good he saw,
And wept that cause of weeping none he had,
But when he heard of harm, he waxed wondrous glad."

This is the diabolical nature of envy:

I am sad when someone has something that I do not have....

This is the diabolical nature of envy:

I am glad when misfortune comes to somebody else,
and his misfortune then gives me an edge.....

This is the diabolical nature of envy:

That it could bring such strange reason for joy and gladness.

And also for clarification, the difference between jealousy and envy. They are not the same. It is true that slander, gossip, envy, jealousy, malice---they're all tied into one neat little package...not neat.... one ugly little package.....

- - envy is: being discontent because somebody else has
something that I don't have

- - jealousy is: being discontent, being unhappy, but I run the risk
of losing what I have to somebody else

You can picture it this way.....

envy begins with empty hands- - I am frustrated, I am unhappy,
I am miserable, because I don't have

jealousy is the tightly-closed fist - - I have, but come wind
or weather, I defy anyone to take it away,
and if you should, I will hate you to the day I die!

This is the difference between envy and jealousy. They are twins, but there is
a difference. It is the last sin to die. And it's a sin that stalks every one
of us - - as long as there's one other person around...and it's always the more
vicious if this other person and I are about equal.

This is why it's so deadly among church people. This is why preachers have
more difficulty with this sin, perhaps, than with any other sin; especially when
a whole bunch of preachers get together, and each is a bishop in his own right...
...and you have a group of near-equals together.

What is the antidote for envy? May I permit several suggestions.
First is, to take my soul to task any time I begin to criticize somebody else,
and to ask the question: do I offer this criticism only because I am envious?
and in offering the criticism, I have a way of down-grading the other person?
This is why criticism itself can be so deadly. It's the spawning-ground for
envy.

Or if, perchance, I'm inclined to offer some word of praise--let me take my soul
to task lest I damn the person by my faint praise.....

"That was good....but - "

"That was delightful...but - "

...so I take myself to task, looking for this sin of envy, lest it might be lurking somewhere in the shadows of criticism or even faint praise.

It would be helpful for me, guilty of the sin of envy, when I start thinking of other people and their good fortune, to thank God that in this world such good fortune should exist, and if it hasn't happened to me, then let us thank God that it would happen to somebody else. For the heart of God is generous...and it may be in God's plan that the one who receives what seems to be an advantage that I don't have, that that person, for reasons known only to God, should have that advantage....and let me pray, by the grace of Jesus Christ, to thank God that somewhere in this world there is a person so blessed.

(There's a deaconess that I know in the church. I first met her back in 1947. She has the face of an angel, and the disposition and the temperament that matched the face. And one day I was naive enough to engage her in conversation and say, "How did you get this way?" And her answer is a precious one... "I'll simply have to tell you that one time there was someone who said to me, 'Sister Anna, you have an edge on some of us, because some of us believe that you began with a greater degree of blessedness'...and her answer was this, 'If that should be true, I thank God for it, and I've tried to live as generously as I can because of it.'")

(Let me close with a very, very simple story.

One man says to another man..."It's a handsome thing, isn't it?" They were referring to a perfectly beautiful new automobile. And the one man said--"Do you know what?--So-and-So gave that automobile to his brother as a gift!"

....Maybe 99 people out of 100 would have said, "I wish I had a brother like that"

....but this man said, not given to envying....but this man said

"I wish I could be a brother like that.")

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded.)

Illustration relative to the sermon "Those Deadly Sins - Envy"

(One of the old saints, according to the legend, in his journey overtook two travelers. One was a greedy, avaricious, covetous man; the other was of a jealous and envious nature. When they came to the parting of the ways, the saint said he would give them a parting gift. Whichever made a wish first would have his wish fulfilled, and the other man would get a double portion of what the first had asked for. The greedy man knew what he wanted; but he was afraid to make his wish, because he wanted a double portion and could not bear the thought of his companion getting twice as much as he had. But the envious man was also unwilling to wish first, because he could not stand the idea of his companion getting twice as much as he would get. So each waited for the other to wish first. At length the greedy man took his fellow by the throat and said he would choke him to death unless he made his wish. At that the envious man said: "Very well; I will make my wish. I wish to be made blind in one eye." Immediately he lost the sight of his eye - and his companion went blind in both eyes. So avarice and its companion, envy, blind and curse the soul of man.)

* * *

"TRIUMPHAL ENTRY"

The sermon on this Palm Sunday bears the title, "Triumphal Entry," and the text, from the 11th chapter of the Gospel according to Mark, the 9th and 10th verses:

"And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest."

I tell you, there is the pulsebeat of the centuries in that cry! This is the moment for which every devout Jew had longed. Perhaps we can say very easily that a devout Jewish mother giving birth to a male child could be heard to say, "If it please thee, O God, maybe this son of mine--this child, will grow up to be the promised deliverer." Maybe we can say, and very easily so, that every devout Jew, for generation after generation, had prayed fervently, "If it please thee, O God, maybe before we die the promised one will come."

As long as any Jew could remember, there had always been talk about the promised deliverer. God had called the children of Israel out of all the people on the face of the earth, and God made a promise to them, and to them He said, as He did not say to any other people, "Out of you shall come the promised deliverer of all mankind." This was the dynamic by which the Jewish people went on living generation by generation, enduring all kinds of persecution and torment, but hope eternal went springing in their breasts, because to them God had made a promise.

Now as you study Jewish history, you discover a very interesting thing: that they sometimes permitted themselves to think that this promised deliverer is going to be for the whole world; and God is going to bless the whole world through Israeland this kingdom that He's going to establish is going to be an everlasting

kingdom---a kingdom founded upon peace and righteousness. But now, and you can understand it, can't you?...when the Jew was taken captive, and when he had to live his life in exile, and when, having returned to Jerusalem, he was governed by an occupying power, the Jew began to limit this kingdom of the promised deliverer. The deliverer was going to be for Jews and for Jews only; and when he would come, he'd rid the Jewish people of their enemies, and he'd establish the kingdom of Israel.

They kept talking about this. The fever was never as high as in the day of Jesus Christ. In fact, they believed it so intensely that twice in the lifetime of Jesus Christ there were revolutionaries, rebel Jewish leaders, who established a kind of guerrilla warfare, here and there, against the Roman Empire. Twice in the time of Jesus the Zealots produced an extraordinary kind of leader who tried to throw off the yoke of Rome....and each time the Roman Empire punished them without mercy.

The fever, the temper, everything was ready....."It's about time that he comes." Let me read for you something of historic record---how these Jewish people believed and how they thought and how they talked, and how ever so frequently, when they dealt with God, they reminded Him that He had made a promise and He'd better not break it; and it was high time that He did something about it. Says one writer, part of the fabric of Jewish literature (II Esdras 6:35-39):

"All this I have spoken before to thee, O Lord, because Thou hast said that for our sakes thou madest this world. As for the other nations, which also came from Adam, thou hast said that they are nothing, and are like unto spittle: and thou hast likened the abundance of them unto a drop that falleth from a vessel. And now, O Lord, behold, these nations, which are reputed as nothing, be lords over us, and devour us. But we, thy people, whom thou hast called Thy first-born, Thy only begotten, and Thy fervent lover, are given into their hands. If the world now be made for our sakes, why do we not possess for an inheritance our world? How long shall it endure?"

This is what they were thinking....this is what they were saying.....this is what

they were believing. And now, one day, the man from Nazareth, at 33 years of age, against all of this background, rides triumphantly into the Holy City of Jerusalem.....

...no wonder the people go mad!

...no wonder they repeat prophetic utterances!

...no wonder they quote scripture!

...no wonder they remember the promise--

"Blessed is he now who comes"

This is the one! We of all the people are the most
fortunate! God is going to do something today---

in our day. Here He is. Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest!

Expectancy was at the highest pitch in the history of the Jewish people. This is a matter of fact.

But now I ask you---why?...why did the 'hosanna' turn to 'crucify'? Why did the people who acclaimed Him so readily on a Palm Sunday clamor for His death before the week was over? I can't have done with the question---I have to ask it again and again, and I think I have an answer: they were disappointed. They were disillusioned. They were looking for something all right, but they were looking for the wrong thing. And this man from Nazareth wasn't able to produce it. They had the mistaken notion that when their deliverer came, he would be the kind of man who would deal primarily with battalions, with tanks, with troops. He was the kind of man who would drive their enemies into the sea. He was the kind of a man who overnight would set up the new Israel, the new kingdom. He's have his own subjects, his own prime minister, his own cabinet, his own judges....and overnight everything would be in their hands. And now they would spit upon people. Now they would delight in their death. Now the world would be better. This was what they

expected to happen. This was the only kind of security that they felt they could understand. This was the only kind of kingdom in which they were interested.

But the lesson of Palm Sunday is this: God's specialty is not a strong battalion....or if you want it to be very contemporary, God's preferred instrument today will not be an atom bomb. You just can't maneuver God into establishing things the way you and I think they ought to be established, where our vision is so terribly horizontal---concerned with the things of this world, and only the things of this world. You just can't put a sword in the hand of Jesus Christ!... and say this is His only weapon---if you could even go that far! So they were disappointed in Jesus Christ. So they were disillusioned. They were looking for the wrong things.

You could be missing the point, my friend. You could be limiting all of your thinking right now to two thousand years ago. You could be saying to yourself, that's the way it was then, and that's the way people thought then, and that's what they were looking for in Jesus Christ. But I don't have good news for you at this point, when I think of today. If you and I had a way of probing the depths of people's minds, and if we had our way of dictating a course of action to Jesus Christ now, there could be a sizeable number of people who would think, who would talk, because they believed like this:

"Jesus Christ---we're your people. We have been reading your Book for a long, long time. We've been supporting your cause. We even joined your church. And we pray for the coming of the Kingdom. But, Jesus Christ, we have looked around in this world, and we're quite sick and tired of the way things are going. Frankly, we are quite insecure. These Russians, and now the Chinese, have created a great deal of unrest in this world. Now, Jesus Christ, we're your people. We love you. And you've made certain promises to us. But these other people---they've closed the doors of the churches. They've publicly avowed themselves as anti-God. They're pretty powerful, Jesus Christ, they're pretty powerful. And every now and then we hear the report that they have an advantage on us."

Now, if we're honest with ourselves, we may have to admit that there are people

who talk this way, there are people who think this way, because they are inclined to believe that maybe they have a right to pray that God would wipe them off the face of the earth, and if God doesn't, we're a bit disappointed.

And every now and then someone raises his head and says, "I'll support the Christian church because it's the bulwark against Communism. But here and there there's a prophet who stands up in a Christian pulpit and shakes his finger, by the grace of God, against some of the evils of the Western world. When that begins to happen, when you begin to talk about our sins, and the Christian church takes us, the Western world, to task, there's a kind of enthusiasm for the Christian church that begins to wane.

You see, the eternal truth that's inherent in Palm Sunday isn't something that is confined to two thousand years ago. Why did they turn from 'Hosanna' to 'Crucify'? Because they were disappointed. They wanted a different kind of God. And this God of ours who is the Father of Jesus Christ doesn't suit Himself to our whims and our desired, because they just can't be trusted.

There's another reason why they turned from 'Hosanna' to 'Crucify'. Somewhere, as that holy week progressed, they discovered that Jesus Christ wasn't doing much. And they wanted a man of action. All that He did was talk, and pray. Now He held His own very well in debate, against the scribes, the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin; but they wanted a man who would do something more than talk and just hold his own in debate. They were blind to the fact that all the time Jesus Christ was enduring the emotional, the mental and spiritual warfare of people...

...then there came that experience in Holy Week when He
said, "Won't you join me?"...all the disciples forsook
Him and fled

...there came the time when He went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray....can't you hear the pleading voice of Jesus Christ---"What! Can't you even watch with me one hour? Can't you even pray with me one hour?"

...there came a time when all of a sudden it occurred to them
that Jesus Christ was saying, "Come, walk by my side;
come, stay with me; come, participate in this spiritual
struggle"

.....and they didn't want to participate, for the simple
reason there is a kind of mentality among all of us that prefers a spectator kind
of religion....."God, we're willing to come out and see you do something---God,
we're willing to applaud when you work a miracle---God, we're willing to say Bravo!
Bravo! when you can feed five thousand people out of almost nothing. This we can
watch. We don't mind being spectators. But God, when Jesus Christ stands around
waiting for some of us to come and walk along with Him, to enter into the struggle
.....we're not much interested.")

....and the ugliest of all thoughts is this: we're not much
interested, even to the extent that we'll get rid of it....we just don't want a God
that demands something---of me. We want it a "do-it-yourself religion", but "You,
God---You do it yourself". And the saddest story ever written in the history of
man was when a disciple band was content to let Jesus Christ carry the cross all
by Himself to Calvary....and the only one who gave Him any kind of a lift was a
man who had never been known in the disciple band.

Oh, my friends, it's an easy thing to come, and to wave a palm branch, and
say this is what they did two thousand years ago---it's an easy thing to think of
Jesus Christ entering the Holy City as a man 33 years of age a long, long time ago.
But the truth of Palm Sunday is a contemporary truth. You can't have a king with-
out a kingdom.....and you can't have a kingdom without subjects.....and if you
want Jesus Christ to be your King, then let me invite you, in His name, to become
His willing, His obedient, subjects.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"MORE THAN A MEMORY"

The sermon on this Easter Day bears the title, "More Than A Memory"; and the text, the 15th verse of the 24th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

" - - then Jesus himself drew near - - "

(The mistake of many people lies in the fact that for them Jesus Christ is but a memory; and a memory, no matter how precious, is always something that's second best. The reality of a present moment, properly understood and appreciated, is always to be preferred to a memory.

Because this is true, that disciple band were of all people on the face of the earth the most miserable people from Good Friday and the day that followed, and until the moment that they were made aware that Jesus Christ was alive. For the disciples, you see, were people who had nothing but a memory of Jesus Christ. They sat there huddled together in secrecy, doing nothing but remembering.) And I am inclined to think that if you had pressed any one of them hard enough, he might have said, reluctantly, sadly - - "You know what, friend....I wish I had never met Jesus Christ. Now that He is gone, and now that we have nothing in front of us except the stark reality of a tomb, a lifeless body carried from a cross---it's awful, friend. Would to God we had never known Him!"

You can begin to understand that, can't you? I, for one, have lived long enough to have met people who have gone their way living forever with a detached attitude toward life, for once upon a time they did become involved, they experienced something, they met someone, and then life, cruel as life can be, took this very precious thing away. Now they have nothing but a memory; and they're tortured by the memory of a better day--happiness they once knew that is no more. Because I have met people like that--who do not subscribe to the saying that 'it's better to

have loved and lost than never to have loved at all' - - "Ah", they say to you, "to have loved once, and then to have experienced the pang and the pain that comes with memory--take it from me, my friend, you're better off never having tasted anything as wonderful as that." ...and people who think that way live with a memory, and life stops.

Maybe that's why you can explain what happened on that first Easter Day when two men, having witnessed the crucifixion, having known something about Jesus Christ, having heard about Him--who knows, having met Him face to face--stayed as long as they could in Jerusalem with that terrible memory torturing them; and then on the third day, when they could stand it no longer, they got themselves away from Jerusalem, when the torture of the memory was that great. And they headed toward a town called Emmaus.

(Now Emmaus is on the west of Jerusalem, and these men, haunted by a memory, were traveling toward the sunset. Ah, there you have it! People who have a memory and live with it and stop are people for whom the sun has already begun to set. And this must never be the descriptive of the Christian; for Christians don't live by sunsets. Christians live by sunrises. Isn't that the meaning of Easter? The Christian basically is not a person who says: " - as true as night follows day -"; no...a Christian doesn't say that. A Christian says " - as true as day follows night!".....for Jesus Christ makes the difference between night and day.)

...just as Jesus Christ makes the difference between the blackness of

Calvary and the brightness of the Easter morning

...just as true as there's a difference between despair and hope

..between death and life

..between hate and love

..between sin and salvation

The tragedy for many people is that they are content to allow Jesus Christ to become a memory.

...there are Sunday School boys and girls who grow up to be people having memorized something about Jesus Christ; and then as they become older, they grow away from the experience itself and back in the recesses of their minds, tucked away, is the memory, and that's all they have of Jesus Christ -- a memory of a happy, precious Sunday School experience....

...there are impressionable teenagers who kneel before an altar, confirmed in the Christian Faith, publicly professing faith in Jesus Christ, the reality of the experience is an exceedingly precious thing, and then they may grow up into adulthood, and all that may linger on is the memory of a very precious experience...and that's all they have of Jesus Christ--a memory.

For the disciples, the memory of Jesus Christ did not work too great a blessing. It failed to quicken--it failed to motivate them into doing something. Ah, it was so different when He was with them. Ah, they were the ones who had been promised that they would change the world. They were the ones to whom Jesus Christ said, "Come.. Come after me, and inherit the Kingdom" ...and as long as He was there, inspiring confidence, quickening their spirits, everything was wonderful....but now that He's gone! --the fire has gone, and the light has gone out of their eyes, and the spring has gone from their step. This is what can happen when Christ is only a memory.

Now a memory at best is always second-rate. An awareness of the reality of the present moment, Christ-claimed and Christ-controlled, is always superior. And so Jesus Christ comes back to them; because Jesus Christ never wants a man to live just by a memory. Memories may warm the heart -- didn't these disciples say: "Did not our hearts warm within us?"....but there's something more needed than just warmth. The heart needs to be quickened....the spirit needs to be motivated...the mind and the life need to be directed. A man has to take a new hold on life---he has to begin all over again, and because this is true, Jesus Christ comes back to them.

This is the glory which is Easter: Jesus Christ comes back!

Nothing, absolutely nothing, not even death, can keep

Jesus Christ away from His own!

This is the glory which is Easter: Jesus Christ is more than a

memory. He is an abiding fact!

...He is the Eternal Pilgrim

..He is the Continuing Presence.....

He is always coming back.

And I say to myself...and when He did come back, to whom did He come back?

If I were an artist, which I am reasonably certain I could never be, I might be tempted sometime to paint a picture of Jesus Christ and the appearances of the Resurrection.....

...and for the moment I think I'd be tempted to have Him appear to Pontius Pilate; and then I would be taken short and I would say: this would be a distortion of truth, because the resurrected Christ just doesn't appear to Pontius Pilate....but if He did appear to Pontius Pilate, you know what would happen? --I think I know what would happen.....Pontius Pilate would have gone stark mad, to be confronted by the Living Christ! the Triumphant Christ! ...and to have Him look Pontius Pilate straight in the eye and never say a word---only to be condemned by the past, which couldn't possibly be ignored or evaded...

....when you came back, Jesus Christ, why didn't you go to Caiaphas the high priest? Had you gone to Caiaphas, I think I know what would have happened, Jesus Christ...You would have driven him into insanity...

....when you came back, why didn't you appear to Judas Iscariot? I just don't know what would have happened to Judas Iscariot, had Jesus Christ confronted him....

I know why He didn't come back and appear to Judas Iscariot, Caiaphas, Pontius Pilate- - - because when Jesus Christ appears in front of people, He does

not delight in driving them mad, startling them into fear. When Jesus Christ comes back, He comes back to kindle a fire anew in the heart and soul of those who are His friends. There is something precious for you! ...when Jesus Christ came back, He came back only to His friends. They were the only ones who saw Him. They were the only ones who knew that He was alive. He came back to His friends, nursing a memory, because even though they kept the memory fresh in their minds, somewhere they kindled the light of hope, "He will return."

When He came back to them, where did He find them?

When Jesus Christ comes back, He takes the initiative and He goes looking for us, and He keeps looking for us until He finds us; this ever-living Christ comes to us wherever we happen to be. And if I want Him enough, He will come to me in my disappointment...

He will come to me in my despondency...

He will come to me in my discouragement....

He will come to me in my disillusionment....

He will come to me in my weakness...

...and when He comes back,

He comes back to me wherever I happen to be, wherever I happen to be working.

That, too, is part of the glorious Easter. Jesus Christ comes back to us where we are in this world. You can't possibly have a glory which is Easter if Jesus Christ deals only with a never-never land in the world that's only a world of the spirit. What is the tragedy of Calvary? The tragedy of Calvary is that it happened here.....that it took place where you and I live. And that's why we're haunted by the old negro spiritual, "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?"-- because it happened in our world.

Now, if the tragedy of Calvary is that it happened here, then the triumph of Easter is that it also happened here. The Christ who was crucified is resurrected and comes and finds us here in this world, where you and I have to do battle day

after day in the arena which is life. I couldn't subscribe to the Christian Faith if the Christian Faith was something that always dealt with the world that was yet to come. Any religion so heavenly-minded as that is no earthly good. The glory of Easter: Jesus Christ comes back. And He puts the hand of His faithful disciple freshly to the task, and says....

"There's an economy in the plan of God.

Nothing dare be lost. We've got to be-

gin all over again. Life has to be lived,

and I've come back to be with you always - - "

Some years ago there came to this country a man from China who enrolled in the theological seminary in New York City, Union Seminary. People have been following him with more than ordinary interest; because they tell me he is the one person in the name of the church who has some kind of a contact between Free China and Red China, the one person who deals most with Christians on both sides of the Bamboo Curtain, as far as China is concerned. They had listened to what he had to say. They asked him to speak. They asked him to write. Usually he strikes this note... "My Christian friends are interested in me. My Christian friends are interested in Chinese Christians. And invariably, my Christian friends say to me, 'Is there any future for the church in Red China?'" And this distinguished Chinese Christian says, "I am completely surprized that Christians would ever raise a question like that!--'Does Jesus Christ have any future?' is a question that dare never to be raised by a Christian."

Whatever land you may name, Jesus Christ is alive!...and if He is alive, then He is at work---everywhere. That's why He came back---to continue the work in us.
Jesus Christ is alive! He is a living presence! He is in the world--right now.
You just can't stop God.

But what you have to remember is this: He doesn't always work spectacularly as the world thinks He ought to work. He is not at work sensationally in Red China

right now, but He is at work. It was not a spectacular thing when He appeared to two weary travelers on the road to Emmaus. It was not a great world spectacle when He appeared to a handfull of fear-ridden disciples in an upper room, but He appeared.

We call Easter the glorious spectacle of the Christian religion, but when Easter occurred at the beginning, it was not a world sensation. Only those who wanted something more than a memory knew that it happened....

...and only those who keep Jesus Christ just as a memory now will never know that it's going on right now.

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as delivered.)

"THE INTRUSIVE CHRIST"

The sermon on this first Sunday after Easter bears the title, "The Intrusive Christ" and the text is from the Gospel for the day, and it's the 19th verse of the 20th chapter of John:

"Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you."

What happened that night was quite typical. Man has always been one to shut out Jesus Christ. Blindly or deliberately, he's always been trying to keep Him on the outside. It was so terribly true the night Jesus came to earth for the first time. Don't you remember how the Gospel recorder puts it: " - - there was no room"this has been the descriptive that people have said about Jesus Christ time and again....."He must be kept on the outside. There's no place for Him on the inside."

You see, this is what begins to happen when you look at something more than just a set of facts. Now the facts in the case are these: word had gotten around that Jesus Christ was dead. The disciple band who had come to know Him and to love Him were absolutely horrified by the death of their leader. They were horrified for two reasons.

The first reason, of course--they had lost their friend.

...they had lost the one who had put a song into
their lives

..they had lost the one who had given them a
purpose for which to live

This is a tremendous thing--to lose someone like that.

They were horrified for another reason. They knew very well the pattern.....

...first you get rid of the leader; then you liquidate his followers.
And this is the way they must have reasoned among themselves....

"Now that they've gotten Jesus of Nazareth out of the way---

Matthew, you know you're next, don't you?

...maybe we'd better say, Peter, they'll be coming for you!

Andrew, quiet as you may have been, don't you think for a
single moment that your commitment to Jesus Christ
has gone unnoticed! - - "

....so they reasoned among themselves....

....so they were terribly, terribly afraid.

If they would do this to their leader, then, knowing what faithfulness there was
in the band, even though they betrayed, denied and forsook Him, there is always
the desire of another new leader to be recognized.....

" - - so that that won't happen, we'll wipe out the whole band - - "

...that's why you found them all huddled together in a room in Jerusalem...afraid.
Afraid because of the death blow that had come to their leader...afraid because
they knew that they would be next. As they huddled together, they shut every door.
The Bible is always the realistic text. The Bible says every door was shut because
they were afraid. Now these are the facts in the case.

But a man who has lived any length of time knows that you can never go through
life simply staring a fact in the eye and just keep quoting the fact again and
again---you have to begin to interpret the fact. What does this mean to us? And
as I come to this desk the Sunday after Easter I am constrained to remind you that
there's a certain suggestiveness here that cannot be ignored. What you really have
here is not a band of disciples behind closed doors. What you also have is a band
of disciples behind closed minds and behind closed hearts. And this is the greater
tragedy.

They were men, make no mistake about it, who were the disciple band with the closed minds. They had done a certain amount of thinking about Jesus Christ, and then something happened and they stopped thinking beyond that point. They had come to recognize Him as their leader....they had claimed Him as their Master. And as they went along with Jesus Christ, they thought a great deal about Him untiluntil that awful thing happened on Calvary's hill. And once they crucified Jesus Christ, they stopped thinking....

"Nothing more can happen now. There is no
greater realm of activity for God.....this is it! "

Now whenever you stop thinking at a particular point, you immediately close out any other possibility...."Then were the disciples assembled together for fear of the Jews".....

...because they were afraid, the doors to the room were closed

...because they were afraid, their minds were closed

"God isn't going to do anything else.

God has done what God had planned to do - - this is it."

It's a sad thing in any man's life when he stops thinking about the activity of God. It's a sad thing in any person's life when he stops thinking about any more wonderful thing that could yet happen to him. Let me make an admission to you this morning; these more than six years ago when I came to Saint Luke Church, I wanted so much, as best I could, to identify myself with the fifteen years of the history of this congregation that had preceded my coming. I would listen to some of you talk about those other days--those other years. And the way I heard you talk, and the way I would listen, I began to think that I had been denied something. I wanted so much to have been a part of your earlier history....only a handful of people, and then to see the group grow and develop--to be able to count

on so much loyalty, so much enthusiasm.

...when I remember how you used to tell that there was no janitor on the staff--no Director of Christian Education--a volunteer organist--a volunteer choir director---the only paid person around was the Pastor.....and whenever a Sunday morning had been planned for, the people came early in the morning, or worked late Saturday night. I wanted so much in my mind to have been part of that glorious past.....

And then I took myself to task. And I said something as realistically as I could say to myself: no matter how wonderful these first two decades in Saint Luke Church might have been, the glory of Saint Luke Church must never be in her past and in her past alone. The glory must lie in the truth that God always has some better thing awaiting us. God always has some other horizon toward which He wants us to lift our eyes. God always has some other venture waiting for us to assume. If I did not believe this, I would forfeit my right to be your Pastor. If I did not believe that, I would be one content only to serve today with no thought whatsoever of tomorrow. Whatever you and I do today becomes far more precious because we have our eye on tomorrow. We just can't close our minds about God. We just can't close our minds at a point and say this is where God stopped working in Saint Luke Church....lest we become like that disciple band, and become afraid...

....this is it!)

But the wonderful thing about Jesus Christ is this....whatever descriptive you may have for Him, may I encourage you to keep this one in your listing: He is the Intrusive Christ. He refuses to be shut out. The story of Easter, as you well know, no matter what page to which you turn, is the story of Jesus Christ who keeps coming back---who intrudes upon the disciple band---who says, "You can't ignore me ...you can't evade me".....the wonderful thing about Jesus Christ is this: that once He has ever gotten into any man's life at all, Jesus Christ will never stay

on the outside from that point on. Once He has ever gotten into your life, no matter how brief a period it may have been, He has a way of getting back on the inside, if only to disturb you...if only to irritate you....if only to annoy you--lest you become too content with life without Him.

(This is the glory of Jesus Christ--He is the Intrusive One....He keeps coming back and breaking through. He's always within reach--asking for some kind of attention. It is Jesus Christ who sublimely takes the initiative. This is the Christian truth: Christ comes to us! Christ breaks through into my heart! I really don't find Jesus Christ--I am found of Him and by Him. When the disciples were in that room and their minds were closed by fear, they themselves were unable to dispel the shades of fear, and because they could not have done with the fear that enveloped them, it took Jesus Christ to come in, and break through into their midst and to stay right there.

God's always been like that. The first thing that God has to take away from your heart when He wants to enter is that curtain of fear. When the Bethlehem messenger announced the birth of Jesus Christ, what was the first thing that he said to whom the announcement came? - - "Fear not - - get rid of your fear, because I have something wonderful to tell you about God--He's not dead--He's going to come and live with you!")

...the white-robed messenger in the Resurrection Garden, before he could make the announcement about Jesus Christ having arisen--the first thing he had to do was to part the curtain of fear from those who came early in the morning...."Fear not! --He is not here--listen to what I have to tell you!"

And Jesus Christ comes into a man's heart and says the first thing you have to get rid of is fear; and the second thing you have to get rid of is doubt...

" - - and then let me come in and let me tell you certain things."

You and I go through life, always the fear-ridden. Yes, we are. Fear is the one word that belongs to all of us. Some of us are afraid of our past. Some of us are

afraid of the future. Some of us are afraid of the pressing demands of the present moment, and we find little comfort in the word of the old king-philosopher who said, speaking of the present moment, "This, too, shall pass." Jesus Christ intrudes on our fear, no matter where it may occur.

Let me share something with you now, never read elsewhere—I've never heard it intimated before....let us take the journey of a person through life. Let us find him at the place where he's old enough to fall in love. He finds the one woman in the world who is meant for him. They become married. As follows what ought to follow, because marriage means the establishment of the family, there is a child. Sober-thinking parents--frightened...fear...entrusted to them, a child.....and as long as two people live they have no greater responsibility than what they owe to a child....

" - - what shall we do with this child?

- - how can we be certain that the future
will be greater? "

...while they're ridden by fear, Jesus Christ appears, with outstretched hands, and Jesus Christ says...

"Suffer the little children to come unto me--forbid them
not, for of such is the Kingdom - - "

...and every time a child is baptized, even as
the child who is to be baptized after the 11:00
service today, Jesus Christ intrudes upon the
life of that home---Jesus Christ appears---Jesus
Christ says, "Let there be no fear; the child be-
longs to me, and I will help you to rear and train
that child in the nurture and admonition of God
Himself - - "

...the child grows. He reaches the age of accountability. He takes life seriously. And in that teenage moment he's confronted by the question: what shall I do with my

life?

...and there in a major moment Christ appears to him, and there have been youngsters in the moment of Confirmation who have not found a great fear in life, but a great joy, to be claimed by Jesus Christ, and to have Jesus Christ intrude upon their lives, and to have Jesus Christ say.....

"You can't keep me out--you belong to Me---I
belong to you---nothing can break this bond
between us!"

...and God takes away their fear.

....and dare I go on to tell you that there comes to this man, as maturation has run its process, what is certain for every man - - death. And he comes to that moment by himself. He could be afraid--afraid to face death.

....and for the Christian Jesus Christ intrudes again. Jesus Christ looms upon the horizon. Jesus Christ stands in front of him and says.....

"I am the Resurrection and the Life. Him that
cometh unto me I will not cast out - - "

This is the Intrusive Christ--always breaking through in every major moment of our life, and when He breaks through, the first word to those who believe.....

"Do not be afraid...I have come to give you peace."

Tarry for a moment longer and let me tell you a very meaningful thing that happened in the life of a virgin Christian. She's the subject of a world-famous painting that bears the title, "The Last Token." In the days when the emperor was making sport of the Christians, he found this virgin, and because she would not renounce the name of Jesus Christ, he had her thrown into the dungeon...and then she was to be released into the arena...then she would be torn into shreds by the lion.

Clothed in pure white except for the black of the hood that draped her shoulders,

"The Intrusive Christ" (8)

the artist pictures her there waiting for certain death. The emperor is on his throne, the entire arena is filled by those who are there to see Christians die. The painting bears the title, "The Last Token" and the artist has painted at the feet of the maiden pure a white rose.....and the interpretation of the painting is this: as the lion is about to pounce upon her, the grating from his cell having been raised, the eyes of the maiden are not upon the lion. The eyes of the maiden are not upon the emperor, whom she could have hated. But the eyes of the maiden are filled with peace, and there is no fear, because she's looking upward and outward to find the face of her beloved who has thrown at her feet, even in the moment of certain death, his last token of abiding faithfulness. That's why the artist couldn't possibly paint fear in her eyes....the love of someone had taken that fear away.

....The love of God keeps coming back to us - -

- - Intrusive Love - -

...and when we're made aware of it,
fear loses its hold upon us.

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded on tape.)

"THE CHRISTIAN HOME"

There is no better text around which we should center our thoughts on this day which marks the Festival of the Christian Home than the closing verses of the 2nd chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, verses 51 and 52:

"And Jesus returned unto Nazareth and was subject unto them: and Mary pondered and kept all these things in her heart.
And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."

If ever there were two verses of Scripture which belong to each other, these are those two verses of Scripture. The one rightfully follows the other....

"And Jesus returned unto Nazareth - - ".....that's where He lived, you know--that's where His home was. And when He returned to Nazareth He was subject unto His parents. The Bible tells the story exactly as it occurred..."He was subject to His parents."

...and then as though it's the natural result--you see, this verse just has to follow that one....."returning to Nazareth He was subject to His parents - - " and then, "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man."

...as though this verse of Scripture is saying to us.....because He was the obedient teenager He was able to grow up into full-orbed manhood, and all of this because of the interplay of the forces which surrounded Him in that home in Nazareth.

Perhaps you were shocked a bit when I used the figure of speech, "Jesus Christ--the Teenager." Somehow or other we don't think of Him as a teenager, generally speaking. But Scripture says at this impressionable age of His life that's exact-

ly what He was..."and he went down to Nazareth"....and then the Scripture implies the kind of teenager that He was. Some few years ago I saw a reproduction of the original drawing prepared for some Christian Education textbooks of another denomination. This particular series of lessons was dealing with the growing Christ. And the artist, in a very daring mood, pictures Jesus Christ in shorts....not in the conventional way that you picture Him, in the long flowing garment....but he pictures Him in the garb of a teenager in the 20th century. Naturally it was a highly controversial thing. There were a number of writers who said this ought never to be--this cheapens the Christ. And yet on the other hand I submit to you, that it's a challenging thing to realize that Jesus Christ was a lad and was influenced by the pressures and the tensions of His day.

Maybe we shy away from anything that makes God contemporary. Maybe we keep our distance from anything that makes God a living reality in the 20th century. It's a lot easier to deal with Jesus Christ pictured--remotely removed in a stained-glass window, of another generation, of another order of life. Maybe it's a lot easier for us Christians to come and to praise the God who is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob---the God of the distant past....but to think of Jesus Christ as being contemporary, or to think of Jesus Christ in something of the thought patterns of our day, can become a very challenging thing. I'm not here, for the moment, to build a case one way or the other, but I am here to tell you that without hesitation, I do refer to Jesus Christ as a teenager, and I do refer to Jesus Christ as an impressionable teenager, and I do refer to the fact, on this day, that Jesus Christ grew up and developed into full-orbed manhood, as a human being, because, not in spite of, the influences of that home in Nazareth.

I can't tell you too much about that home in Nazareth. A number of years ago I walked the streets of Nazareth, trying to picture the ~~Christ~~ kind of home in which Jesus grew up as an impressionable teenager; and if my knowledge of Nazareth is cor-

rect, it was a very, very simple home, almost bare of any furniture whatsoever. I don't think He ever enjoyed a sumptuous meal in His home such as you and I enjoy today. I don't have to go down the list of all the things they didn't have....it's sufficient for me to tell you of what they did have.....

...in that almost bare room which constituted His home in Nazareth, He had a father and a mother who loved each other. He had a mother, who, when she thought of Him, took to heart everything that He said, and pondered ever so seriously this growing child of hers. He had a father who was the kind of man against whom He could think no evil. He had a father so worthy of His respect that years later, when He gave people unforgettable pictures of God, without any hesitation, without any reservation, He said, "When you think of God, use the term 'Father'." There was something in the make-up of Joseph that allowed Jesus Christ freely to use the figure of speech for the Eternal One. Not so Martin Luther, you know. Martin Luther, he tells us, used to shudder when he prayed the Lord's Prayer and used the term 'Father', for the father of Martin Luther was a very severe one, a very austere, a very demanding soul. Maybe if Martin Luther could be honest with us, he might say, "The very last thing in the world that I want God to be is to be someone who had certain qualities which my father possessed."

.....in that home in Nazareth there was a teenager who was tremendously impressed by the basic character and the basic integrity of a man named Joseph who was His earthly father.

Now of all the things they didn't have in Nazareth, it's sufficient to say that in that home there was a father, there was a mother---they loved each other.... and the mother took seriously the responsibility of motherhood, and the father tried to be every inch a man worthy of the undying respect of his child.

There was in that home in Nazareth not only love, but there was also authority. According to good Jewish custom, there was no mistaking about it, Joseph was the head of the house. What Joseph said was the first word and the last word. There was no vacillation, there was no wavering between the mother and the father. These are the two things that characterized, from a human angle, that home in Nazareth to which Jesus Christ was exposed.....love and authority.

.....But there's a third element that must be remembered. In that home God was constantly a part of all the vocabulary. There was fear in that home for God. There was respect in that home for God. Nothing was ever done without some concern as to how this might be acceptable to God.

....now this was the kind of home in which Jesus Christ was reared.

You and I in the 20th century who take the name of Jesus Christ do well to ask the question:

...how are we getting along with the homes that we've established?

...is my home a home worthy of the descriptive "Christian"?

...how Christian is your home? is the question that has to be asked today.

Do we have a guide? Is there any pattern we can follow? Well who knows but what God allowed Jesus Christ to grow up in that home in Nazareth so that that home in Nazareth should be a guide for us.

So now we begin by asking the simple question....

is ours a home where love exists between the father and the mother?

...for children have a way of reacting according to the environment that surrounds them. Is love there?

The second question.....

is there authority in our home? does the teenager of today know that there are certain things that must be done and certain things that can't be done? is there a consistency of character on the part of the parents that even spells authority itself? You know as well as I that it's not an easy thing to have authority in today's

It's all so different. When civilization was largely agrarian, and when the father was always at home and always within reach, it was easy to look to him to make decisions. Nowadays when father may be going away to work, weeks at a time, if not days at a time, who is the authority?—especially so when in today's picture 45% of all women between the ages of 45 and 55 are working women. It's not easy in today's age for one person to always be in the home when the children are there, and to set up certain standards, rules and regulations that must be obeyed and respected....it's not easy. The absent father, the otherwise occupied mother, is a picture of the contemporary home that vexes and irritates us all too often.

(The last question.....

is there respect for God? is God an ever-present reality in our homes? will all that we do be shaped and patterned by the influence of our concept of God? There was a day - - oh, it's gone long since, when in every dining room or kitchen....."Christ is the unseen Guest, the Head of this house, the Silent Listener" ...they even put it into a motto, you see, and framed it and put it on the wall, that they might not forget. Maybe something happened to our civilization when we thought those mottoes old-fashioned—maybe something happened. And what happened wasn't necessarily good. In the contemporary home, whatever knowledge there may be of God is gotten largely, they tell me now, by forces outside the home.....and we who are charged with the program of Christian Education in Saint Luke Church recognize the terrible risk that we run that we should be doing and might be doing, something that properly belongs in the home itself. There are those who say that 90% of all the religious instruction that any child receives he gets somewhere other than in his home.)

In the day of Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ was introduced to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to Moses—to all the godly characters of the Old Testament, first of all from the Bible stories that He heard from Mary and Joseph. We have a right to believe this, because this was typical of the Jewish home. And when He went off to synagogue

school, the school simply implemented what He received at home. Today's picture is largely just the opposite. For the greater part, it's the Sunday School and the Christian church that's teaching. Even in the time of Martin Luther, when he wrote the Catechism---you read for yourself the introduction to the Catechism, and what do you read?....Martin Luther says--"This is recommended for fathers and mothers to teach their children---in their own homes."

....this is the risk we run, that with our programs today we should take over what rightly belongs to the Christian home.

I tell you this morning that in the plan of God the home is the essential unit for society. There is absolutely no substitute for it. I have been told this morning that for 19 years Soviet Russia tried to tear down the home, and to evade recognition of the family as a unit. But after 19 years Soviet Russia has changed her mind!...and even godless communism recognizes the essential, the home, the family unit. Within the family, you see, there are the interplay of forces, the observance of an example, a sanctuary where a person is loved and accepted and forgiven.

When God saw fit to visit this earth, He came in the form of a human being. In my fancy I picture it now---I've never known it pictured like this in any other way.....

The Archangel looks down from Heaven above and he says to God--

"So you're going to earth, are you? and you want to spend at least 33 years there? Where will you spend the greater part of those 33 years? What will you count upon as the formative influences upon your life as a human being?"

And God said--

"I will look for a man named Joseph, and I'll look for a woman named Mary, and I will trust them with Jesus Christ....

....and I will count on them in their home to fashion this
human life..."

Two thousand years ago God looked down from Heaven above, and so it would seem to me, He didn't have too much trouble finding a Mary, finding a Joseph.

The scene changes quickly to the 20th century....and I say to you, with the birth of every child, God invades His world again. Now with the prospect of a child coming into the world---any child---God looks down from Heaven above, and the Archangel says.....

"It's not as easy this time, God....not as easy, to find
a Mary and a Joseph. I'll tell you why, God.....

one out of every four marriages ends in the breaking
of family ties!

...it's not as easy this time, God.....

there's a great deal of sexual irregularity down there,
a great deal of infidelity!

...it's not as easy this time, God."

But God doesn't give up hope.

God says, "The family is still the preferred way. It's the essential unit for the formative influences upon a child's life."

And God chances it again.....and again.....and again....

....with you, and with me.

....and then as we become a little bit more mature,
we earnestly pray that we might not have failed the God who is willing to
take so great a chance in your heart and in mine.

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A person's most meaningful relationships are found with the family.

Let us turn to a consideration of the family from the standpoint that, for the Christian, the family is a principal instrument of the church in Christian nurture. Public education has recognized the importance of relationships. In the April 1957 issue of CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, Fannie R. Shaftel writes: 'Every human being is a product of several forces - - biological pressures that make for growth and for differentiation; social forces that are the expectations and the pressures presented by those individuals or groups with whom he interacts--family, friends, teachers, other adults; and desires and needs which arise and become patterned in the individual himself. When we view the human infant growing up in our culture, we can see how society shapes this biological organism into a personality--into a feeling, acting, thinking, individual. Each person in a very real sense is a product of what adults have done to young children. This emphasis on the importance of the family is something Christians have long believed but have often neglected. More than a century ago Horace Bushnell showed us how the very nature of family relationships made it inevitable that parents would make a deep impression upon their children. Since this is so, he believed that this kind of unity in the family is according to divine intention, in order that there may be a possibility for the 'nurture of holy virtue' at the very beginning of life.

"The child is born into relationships. If it is a proper relationship of parents united in love, then love is there, ready to receive him. This love is conditioned by what the parents are, but also by what they are capable of becoming. It is affected by their maturity, their attitudes, their relationships to each other, their hopes and intentions for the child, and the way they see themselves as growing persons, with a purpose to their lives."

"From this point of view, the family is an amazing instrument for the development of human personality and character. In it the infant gets the kind of care that makes it possible for him to survive. But physical survival is not all. We believe that God has for every person a purpose far beyond mere survival. All that we mean by personality and character, mind and spirit, purpose and destiny, hope and fulfillment, love and sacrifice, honor and heroism, is involved. These are developed (or thwarted) first in the family."

"No nation can rise above the quality of its family life. This statement, in an age when it is very easy to become mesmerized by the large issues of the hour, should be pondered. The family must come first. The family, after all, remains the world's chief nursery of character, deeply influencing every living personality. The family regularizes and keeps wholesome the sexual life of the human race. The family, to a greater degree than is often realized, gives a basis for political stability. In other words, the fate of the family goes far toward determining the fate of an era."

A Child's Basic Needs

by Dorothy B. Fritz in
"The Spiritual Growth of Children"

1. The need to be loved and to love
2. The need for security and trust
3. The need for acceptance and forgiveness
4. The need to achieve and to serve

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"A MAN NAMED MATTHIAS"

The sermon bears the title, "A Man Named Matthias;" and the text is the 26th verse of the first chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

I can't tell you that it happened exactly like this, but if you'll allow something of a sanctified imagination, we might say that it could have happened like this: it was six weeks after the resurrection...a lot had happened in the life of the disciples....

...they had known their Lord to have been crucified

...they had known the joy of the resurrection in the morning

...and then, time and again, Jesus Christ had a way of

coming back to them and making Himself known

...now after six weeks, as they were gathered together, Peter, bless his soul, self-appointed leader that he was, stood up and wanted to make a speech. I think he must have recalled for them the things that had happened--he went down event after event, and then he said....

"It is my sad duty to remind you that one of our original number disqualified himself as a disciple. It was Judas Iscariot, one of us, who betrayed our Lord."

...now that's about all that he said.

I am constantly amazed by the fact that he never said more. There is no tendency on their part to grind Judas Iscariot into the dust. Not a single one of them seemed to have been disposed to say mean and ugly things about the betrayer. I think I know the reason why: there wasn't any one of them in a posi-

tion to do it, even if it could have been done with a fair degree of justice, for when the story was finally made known, all of the twelve ran away - - one betrayed, that is true - - Peter denied - - and the rest of the ten kept themselves at a safe distance, never so much as to have said one good thing when the chips were down. Because this happened to be the predicament of each of the twelve, it just didn't become any one of them to shake the finger of judgment upon the memory of Judas Iscariot.

Well, presumably, this is the reason why Simon Peter simply recited the facts in the case...

"One of our number has disqualified himself. There is a vacancy in our ranks."

...and then Peter went on to speak, presumably to say to them,

"You understand why I'm talking to you like this right now, don't you? We've just experienced our last moments on this earth with Jesus Christ, our Master. We were all there with Him on the Mount of the Ascension. You remember His words - - !"

...people have a way of remembering the last words of famous men...

" - - you remember how He said to us,

'Go, now.....preach! ...teach! ...baptize! ...make disciples!
...get up---go about the world! ...begin at Jerusalem,
Judea, Samariago into all the world---proclaim the
Kingdom!'

"Now with these words of our Master ringing in our ears, don't you think it's about time that we become twelve again? don't you suppose it's about time that we become the full complement--- this disciple band that Jesus had when He was here on earth."

Now that's about the shape of the thing.

...six weeks had passed

...only eleven disciples

...the ringing challenge of Jesus Christ to get up now and go

out and tell the good news to the whole world

...and then Peter, self-appointed leader, standing up and saying,

"We'd better get back up to full strength."

...it's a surprising thing to me that it ever happened at all
that way.

Had I been one of the eleven, I could never have given heart to Peter's suggestion. I would have known a measure of fatalism--I would have said, "Peter, I can't wax as enthusiastic about your suggestion as you would like me to wax. Do you know what you're suggesting, Peter? You're suggesting that we are able to choose a twelfth man. I don't have confidence in my ability to do it, Peter, and I'll tell you why.....if our Lord, with all the wisdom that becomes God---if our Lord, with all the patience that became Jesus Christ, could choose twelve men, and of that twelve one of them would disqualify, what makes you think, Peter, that our wisdom is any better? Maybe we'd better let things ride as they are, Peter. Let's take no more chances...

...I'll tell you another reason why I feel this way, Peter- - "

(speaking, now, had I been one of the disciples)

...why Peter, it never occurred to you that Judas would be a betrayer - - it never occurred to me! Don't you remember when we were up there in the upper room and Jesus Himself said, 'One of this number is going to betray me' - - and we each looked at each other and we said, 'Don't tell us, Lord! Why, this is the last thing in the world that we would ever think of!'Peter, none of us ever suspected Judas Iscariot...and, Peter, none of us ever suspected for a single

moment that this could happen to any of us, let alone have it be Judas Iscariot! I have no confidence, Peter, in my ability to make a choice. If our Lord drew a bad apple, if our Lord drew a dud, if our Lord drew a black sheep....what might happen with our wisdom?"

...that's the way I might have reasoned

...and that's why I think it's a perfectly amazing thing

that they were willing to take a chance on somebody else!

But when I talk this way, I'm only giving you half the story. When I talk this way, I'm forgetting to fill you in with something that had happened.

Once there were twelve, now only eleven...

...but over a six-week period Jesus Christ came back to every one of those eleven men, and each time He came back to them, He had a way, figuratively speaking, of putting His arm around them, and saying, "I trust you. I've come back to you, and I want to re-establish the bond that once was broken. I still believe in you! And I have no other way by which to suggest that the Kingdom advance....

"....Matthew, you're still my man!

"....Andrew, you're still my man!

"...Bartholomew, Simon Peter - - "

...He named them

"I still believe in you!

...and I charge you all over again with the responsibility that

I entrusted to you. This is the way the Kingdom advances!"

From that moment, each one of the disciples, each one of the eleven, knew himself in the company of the forgiven. Now when Jesus Christ forgives a man, when Jesus Christ says, "I re-establish my faith in you" ...how could they do less? If Jesus Christ could treat them that way, this was reason enough for them

to have faith in somebody else. The sad and unpleasant truth of the Christian religion is this: that we have always had men disqualify themselves in the Christian church. One vacancy occurs after another. And the tragic truth is that the vacancy frequently occurs by a man who disqualifies himself. Judas is just one, perhaps the first of many. But God says the vacancy should be filled.

Now once they decided to fill the vacancy created by the suicidal death of Judas Iscariot, how did they make their choice? Well, they had a custom in those days--they drew lots. The nominees had their names put upon pieces of stone that they had chipped, then they put these pieces of stone in a vessel or container and they shook them up vigorously...and then the first stone that fell out--and they'd run like mad, to look at it...and then they'd read the man's name. This was what they meant when a man was chosen by lot.

Even though this might have been the method, you see, they still had to do a great deal of soul-searching and a great deal of thinking, because somebody had to be responsible for writing certain names from which the lot finally would be chosen.....now who is going to decide whose name appears? Well, they did their soul-searching and they set up their criteria. You can read it for yourself in the closing verses of the first chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. They said....

"Whoever becomes the successor to Judas Iscariot must be a man who will be a witness to the resurrection - - he has to be a man who can tell other people that Jesus Christ is alive! This is the role, this is the assumption, of an apostle. Now, who can qualify on this score?"

Well, they spelled that out, too....

"It will have to be a man, therefore, who companied with us....

...who had been with Jesus Christ...who knows this to be true
for himself!"

...it was simple, as simple as that!

"The man who becomes a successor to Judas Iscariot must be able
to tell people that Jesus Christ is alive! To be qualified for
this important role, he must be a man who knows this, first-hand."

Well, on that basis, they began to look around.

They came up with two names--two names of which we had never heard before--
these two particular men; and once their names appear in the closing verses of
the first chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, they never appear again.
One man's name was Joseph; another man's name was Matthias. As far as the disci-
ples were concerned, either one of them was qualified to be the successor to Judas
Iscariot. And the lot was drawn.

I call your attention to several things: first of all, Joseph was never
heard of again--that is, nowhere in the Bible do you read about him. And in the
same breath I have to say, nowhere in the Bible do you read again about Matthias,
successor to Judas Iscariot. It is enough to know that in all likelihood he never
disqualified himself. It is enough to know that he fitted in with the ranks of
the redeemed, did the day's work, and glorified Jesus Christ. I wish I could tell
you more about this man named Matthias, but this is all the Scripture allows.

But why do I invite your attention for twenty minutes to this man? I'll
tell you why.

In a certain sense, every single one of us becomes the successor to Judas
Iscariot. Every time in the company of the ranks of the redeemed a man falls out,
defects, becomes a betrayer, disqualifies himself.....all the rest of us, it can
be said, are called upon to fill in the gap. But can you qualify, to become a
worthy disciple? to fulfill the role of a disciple, can you qualify? What the

church needs more than anything else is people who know in their hearts, by experience, that Jesus Christ is alive! And the ranks that need to be filled can never be filled except by people who can qualify on that score.....

(we don't need people who can explain Jesus Christ

we don't need people who can explain church history

...believe you me this! - - men and women are saved to Jesus Christ
never by explanation alone!

...a man does not say, "I give my heart to Jesus Christ because somebody told me that He was born in Bethlehem and that He lived in Nazareth- - "...

...a man is willing to give his heart to Jesus Christ when he finds someone who says, "It is true that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem---it is true that He lived in Nazareth....but I'm here to tell you something more wonderful than that---He was born in my heart! and He lives in my soul!")

...this is what it is to be a Matthias, to be a successor to Judas Iscariot---
to know that Jesus Christ is alive.

If I mentioned his name for you, you would know him. He could be satirical, he could be radical. He prided himself on the fact that he was outside the Christian church. But on Easter, not too long ago, he decided to go to church--on an Easter Day, the one great day in the Christian church when we make much of the fact that death could not claim Jesus Christ, but He's alive!....and our outsider was not very much pleased with what he found on the inside. He went to church twice on Easter Day--two different churches. He heard two different sermons. He shared the fellowship of two different congregations. He observed them at prayer. He heard them sing. He listened to a man in the pulpit. And then, with that curiosity that belonged to him, he read the extracts of sermons in the morning paper on the Monday that followed. And then he wrote an indictment of Christians.

...and his damning thing was this:

"In all that I went to find on Easter Day and all that I read on Easter Monday, I have not been given to feel on the part of all of you who proclaim faith in Jesus Christ that you believe that there's something dynamic about your religion; that there are certain things you are compelled to do because the love of Christ, an ever-present reality, constrains you to do it. Even () that you people honestly believe that Jesus Christ is alive today."

And then he said something unkind about preachers. He said:

"You preachers blame people and you say people are insensitive to the Gospel."

He said,

"I want to blame you preachers, because you don't give people anything of the wonder and the glory and the majesty of God. There's nothing mystical about the truth that you proclaim. You're wont to compromise and make it such an earthy thing. Let me tell you preachers something - - "

Said he,

"When you share with people something of the transcendent quality of Jesus Christ, and at the same time something of His indwelling spirit in people's lives - - and you show me enough people where this has happened.....then you Christians have a right to believe that you can claim the world."

Really, now, I don't have to say anything more, do I?

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded on tape.)

"GOD GIVES NO OPTIONS"

The sermon is another in the series based upon passages from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. Today's sermon bears the title, "God Gives No Options"; and the text is the 4th verse of the 1st chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"And while staying with them he charged them
not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait
for the promise of the Father - - "

You may rest assured, my friend, that it didn't make much sense to them, this strong, severe demand that Jesus Christ was making of them. If it hadn't been for the love that He claimed in their hearts, I am reasonably certain that they would have given Him a mighty tough time. For, you see, they had alternatives. If God so much as would have given them only a chance to recommend what they would like to do, very quickly and very earnestly they would have said,

"How about this, Master? We think this would be better - - "

Now let us deal with this particular thing that Jesus Christ was asking them to do....not asking - - telling - - for that's the nature of God. It doesn't become God to ask. God, because He is God, exercises the divine prerogative of telling-- yes, of even demanding. And you can be thankful that He is that kind of a God...a God who is always giving us the benefit of His wisdom and of His knowledge. For after all, to put it this way - - who knows better than God? And to this disciple band He said, "This is it. You stay here in Jerusalem."

I can hear them saying among themselves:

"Jerusalem? Of all places! Jesus, we'd better get out
of here! Don't you realize that as soon as the authorities
know that we are still hanging around Jerusalem, that the
same people who killed you would very eagerly and enthusi-

astically come to us and say 'What a fine thing--here they all are clustered together at a time--we wipe them out with one swell stroke! --we've gotten rid of the leader--now we'll get rid of the key people....'Jesus, it would be a far better thing if we could go somewhere else....it would be a far better thing if we could scatter!

- - Matthew, you go in hiding....go back to Nazareth....

- - Andrew, you stay in Joppa....."

...and so, you see, they would have spotted them--some distance away from Jerusalem they would have scattered their leadership - -

"Why, this is the wiser thing to do!

- - this is the better thing to do, Jesus!"

But God gave them no options.

Jesus gave them no choice.

He said - - "You stay here. You stay right here in Jerusalem."

It didn't make sense to them, but it made sense to God.

Now, from our vantage-point, what is this wisdom of God's which wouldn't permit them a choice? I think after almost two thousand years we can look back and begin to understand what they were not able to appreciate.

In the first place, they were not ready to leave Jerusalem.

In the first place, they did not have, as yet, the most important single thing which was to be characteristic of the Christian church, outside of the knowledge of Christ's love...they didn't have this most important single thing, ~~and~~ that was a unity of spirit. And before they could scatter, they had to have the thing that God wanted them to take wherever they went.

Let us deal with some of these, one at a time.....

- - Jesus Christ wanted them to stay together as a band, until they could
grow together as of one mind and as of one spirit.

...Jesus Christ wanted them to stay together until the process of
the Spirit could unify them.

What is the most valuable thing that Saint Luke Church has?

It isn't her church plant - - proud of it as we can well afford to be....

It isn't her church program - - as much as we constantly strive to improve it and
to add members to our staff, to guide and direct it...

It isn't simply the record of benevolences that we have been able to write in
behalf of Synod and the church at large - - which is exemplary, to say the least....

...The most wonderful thing about Saint Luke Church is and should be the spirit of
her people....the indwelling of God's love in the soul of the person who sits along-
side of you, in front of you, and behind you.

This is the priceless quality of a church.....to be of one mind, and to be of one
spirit. Now you don't get this way overnight! You have to grow together...you have
to live together....

...this is one of the things that always grieves me when at the
first bit of irritation and annoyance a couple will come to
me and say, "Pastor, we can't make a go of it any longer."

- - they have been married, maybe--is it the third year that's
always the most difficult?...something of the glamor is
lost....the endless chores of the housewife who is now a
mother....and then they say, "We think we're going to
scrap it, Pastor. We can't make a go of it. We don't see
eye to eye. We live in two different worlds."

...and then if ever I pray earnestly, it's at that moment- - I, who
have been married 22 years...who might have been able to say,
"Well, it takes time to grow. There are some things that you

learn only as you stay together."

...the one great responsibility which God puts upon any human being is this: to accept another human being in love; and it takes time to do that.

So Jesus Christ says to His disciples - - "You stay right here in Jerusalem. You still need some more time together. Matthew--in your heart you have to accept Peter"...

(because every now and then I think Jesus Christ could say,

'Matthew, you're sitting in judgment on Peter. You know

how flagrantly three times he denied me - ')

....Jesus says to Matthew, "I can tell you something, Matthew. Peter has wept bitterly. He's ashamed of himself. Now, Matthew, you stick it out for a while in Jerusalem. You can't run away from Peter. You have to live with him, and you have to accept him in love....and this happens only as you stay and stick it out! "

It takes time to grow into a blessed human. You can never force love...you can never superimpose upon a people the spirit of unity. It is something that results from being together....working together....sharing things together....
...and so in the wisdom of God, there is to be no choice for the disciples, for nothing can take the place of staying together, until they learn to accept each other in love.

There's another reason why He gave them no choice:

- - because they had to take time to think.

(You and I grow as we are able to think in a reflective way. The pressures of life are far too great upon any one of us, that none of us can be equal to the pressures of life unless occasionally he sits down quietly and takes time to evaluate and to assess the meaning of these things themselves. That's why I, for one, regret the day that America has passed from agrarian culture. I think the ploughman working behind his plough had wonderful opportunity to think....the farmer's wife who went

out into the little plot of ground nearby the house that the farmer had ploughed just for her to have her own little garden...and when she went out and cultivated, and weeded, she had time to think--to reflect ...the school bus, in a certain sense, is a kind of curse upon today's generation. The youngster who could walk to school had time to think...the youngster who could walk away from school when the day's lessons had been taught had time to reflect, to assess, to absorb...
...you won't give me a sympathetic response for it, and I'm not asking you to, but I think sometimes if I were building the ideal church structure, I'd look for enough ground where the church could be built fairly well removed from the main artery of traffic, or from the nearest highway itself...and cars would be parked, perhaps, if at all possible, a quarter of a mile away!...and then people would walk, and as they would walk they would prepare themselves for the experience in God's House.....and when the service was over, rather than getting into a car perhaps within a matter of minutes--almost seconds, as it may be for some of us--and turning the ignition key--on goes the radio!what time do we have to think? ..to reflect? ...to absorb?

....there have been strangers to Saint Luke Church who have said that the part of the service that has meant most to them when they came to Saint Luke was that very, very brief opportunity at the end of the service, when the congregation sat down quietly, and only in a fleeting moment, perhaps, allowed the soul to sit upon all that they had shared in this holy place.
God gave the disciples no choice! With the wisdom that becomes God, there was no option here - - "You stay in Jerusalem. You have a lot to think about." Andrew - - Bartholomew - - before you can scatter yourselves and go out and tell the world about me, this thing has to become very real for you! A great deal has happened in the last six weeks ...the crucifixion ...my re-appearances to you! these

are traumatic experiences--these are tremendous things! ...and they're not to be taken lightly. You stay in Jerusalem. You're not ready to leave. It takes time to absorb!"

...that's why God gave them no option.

There's a third reason why He didn't give them any choice, that they were to run quickly and wisely to some other part of the place:

He said - - "You stay in Jerusalem because you have to understand that the gospel which I preach and which I teach is always relevant to the place where you are."

...if they had their way, being made of the same stripe that you and I are made, they would have said,

"The Gospel had no chance in Jerusalem. Why, they crucified Christ - - this is no place to preach Jesus Christ! It's a lot better in the quiet of Nazareth. Why, we'd even get along better in Bethlehem!

With the wisdom which is God's, "You stay in Jerusalem, because this is the place in which you have to begin. There is no Christianity for Jerusalem and another kind for Bethlehem. There is no one Christian religion for saints, and another Christian religion for sinners. The Gospel is the Gospel! ..and the place at which it is to make its impact is precisely the place where you happen to be right now!" ...you see, this is the wisdom which is God's and that's why He gives no options, because God knows best.

I preach this sermon to you because I am convinced that this is the greatest difficulty that you and I have with God.....an unwillingness on our part to accept, at face value, His directives. With the candor that becomes anyone who takes Jesus Christ seriously, there is always the tendency on our part to throw back alternatives

in the face of Jesus Christ. And all the while Jesus Christ stands firmly and solidly - - "Do this! I'm not asking you--I'm telling you!"

...I don't know why it's so difficult to accept this in the realm of religion.
Wars are won because soldiers obey their commanding officers....

"Their's not to reason why, their's but to do - - "

and if necessary - - "die."

(In an exceedingly precious service this morning at 8:30, twelve young people, in the impressionable years of their lives, were confirmed in the Christian Faith. Within two weeks, a group of some sixty 7th graders will be confirmed in the Christian Faith. I am reasonably convinced that as long as they live, their hardest job will be to believe Jesus Christ, that He knows best, and a willingness to accept His directives.

May I say to you with all the ardor of my soul, there will come moments in your life when the last thing in the world you will want to do is what God says you should do, but I beg you, don't trust your wisdom...

....you can afford to trust Him

...and if He gives you no choice, it's only for the simple reason that what God recommends is far better than anything else that ~~We~~ might name.

This I most certainly believe.)

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

For yet another reason Christ gave them no choice. It was in Jerusalem where they were to stay. Jerusalem, of all places?! There they were to stay because it was necessary for them to understand that the Gospel is relevant to the familiar, to the local scene. The prospect of sharing God's love with far distant peoples is more glamorous than the local setting. Again let me quote from Luccock - - "There is a dateless, eternal wisdom in sticking to the base of concrete experience in every great plan and project. When that basis is forgotten or but dimly perceived, the whole effort is likely to dissolve into mist. It may go up into the stratosphere of thin generality, or off to the horizon of the remote. Of course, there is plenty of horizon-blue in the Book of Acts. But the thrust out to the horizon had carrying power because it started from actual and particular experience. This saving quality of the concrete beginning is so often lost because the concrete beginning is hard to make. It seems tame when compared to the glamor of the distant and undefined."

In essence the only real genuine Christianity that any man has is the kind that can be validly expressed in his immediate situation. All this the disciples had to find out for themselves as they were and where they were. There is no one Christianity for saints and another for sinners; there is no one Christianity for Jerusalem and another for Rome. As it has been wisely put - - "Here in front of you, here at your feet, is the place to begin, if any effective beginning is to be made."

Wasn't it George Fox, the distinguished Quaker leader, who had a vision of Jesus Christ using him, the humble servant of the Lord that he was, to bring people clothed in white raiment into the ranks of the redeemed? And where were the lines forming for the assembly of the saints? The lines were forming amidst the small prosaic villages which were so familiar to Fox.

We take to heart the cry of Schiller - - "O ye millions, we embrace you!" yet fully realizing that it is far more difficult "to act in the exact terms of some real situation!" Today, as always, all "generalities about justice and brotherhood evap-

orate into a mist unless they root in concrete action." So they stayed in Jerusalem until the relevancy of the Gospel was clearly established in their minds and in their wills. See now why God doesn't give any options? What He requires is always what is best.

As we contemplate our present world, its issues come upon us at once:

- (a) "the formidable task of making race relations Christian"
- (b) "the task of making wars to cease"
- (c) "the task of sharing the Gospel - - "

Notations on Sermon

June 3, 1962

"AGAINST THE WORLD'S HATRED"

Text:

" - - even the spirit of truth - - he will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning."
- - John 15:26-27

(It could be that for me it was the first sign of a promise of maturity. I recall so well my first grim realization of the fact that kindness does not always get kindness in return and that no matter how gracious you may be to some people, it does not follow automatically that they will respond.

In the closing chapter of our Lord's life here on earth He seemed to consider it necessary to make this quite plain to His disciples. In the plan of God the time had come when He was to return to Heaven and the disciples were to remain on earth. What could they expect?

Clearly and decisively our Lord gives them a portrait of a hostile world. We can read for ourselves in this 15th chapter of John's Gospel just what some of the things were they might have to face.

In one grand, sublime moment our Lord spelled out for His followers the secret for them by which the future would be unfolded. It was mighty plain speaking on His part, as He pictured the background against which the things yet to happen would occur. Speaking realistically, He said the road ahead was far from easy, and all the cruel and hostile treatment the world had visited upon Him, in like measure would come to them. How they wished it would have been different. If only the world by this time would have gotten all of its hatred and selfishness out of its system, but it doesn't work that way. One of the elementary lessons that the Christian has to learn is that there is no such th'

as a sinless world. There never has been and probably shall not be an optimum climate in which Christians can easily thrive.)

So He said it - - "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also." Now against all of this He further advised that the world would have to be faced up to - - and there wasn't to be any such thing as running away from it. Unfriendly, yes even hostile, as the world would be, it was to be the task of witnessing! It is never a difficult thing to speak up for a thing that is generally popularly accepted, but Christianity was far from being applauded. Hatred and contempt were the two words that characterized the reaction of the world to the Christians. Why were they hated? William Barclay has proposed five different reasons accounting for the slander thrown at them: (1) Christians were said to be insurrectionists. Even though they were the best citizens in the land, they were still maligned because they would not reach for the pinch of incense and declare that Caesar was lord. (2) Christians were called cannibals. The word got around that when they met together as a group they talked about sharing the body of our Lord and drinking the cup of His blood. (3) Christians were said to practice promiscuous immorality. Folks on the outside heard rumors of a love feast and of Christians greeting each other with the kiss of peace. Heaven alone knows how many ugly and sordid stories must have been circulated as a result of this misinterpretation. (4) Christians were said to be incendiaries. You see, they looked for the second coming of Christ. There were all those pictures from the Old Testament designating the Day of the Lord with flaming destruction. II Peter 3:10 puts it "- - the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." You know, of course, what happened when Rome burned. Naturally they blamed the Christians. (5) Christians were said to tamper with family relationships. This was a great blow to Roman

society which looked upon the family as the basic unit. Of course families were divided. Often a wife became a Christian and her husband refused. Children might become Christian and parents fail to accept Christ. Families would be split in two.

As far as God was concerned....the world shouldn't be allowed to get away with it. God's side of the story should be told. How? As always, Christ revealed what was in the Heavenly Father's mind: "But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses - - because you have been with me from the beginning - - "

God is saying, I, myself, will never be silent. I will not allow the matter to rest with the simple facts in the life of Jesus Christ. My Holy Spirit will continue to interpret these truths. I shall endeavor to enter into a man's mind and heart so that he might be able to understand the fact of God. Now you and I can understand this since we are finite human creatures. We can't possibly think the thoughts of God unless God encourages us, illuminates our minds and interprets the truth for us. The best example along this line might be the attempt of a parent to enter into the mind of a child so that the child might be able to apprehend, in some degree at least, the truth of a particular situation. Were it not for the patient, compassionate understanding of the parent, the child might never be able to see or to understand at a given time.

But God seldom does anything just by Himself. It is His usual custom to work through people as well as to work in people. This is why He says, " - - and you too shall be my witnesses."

This is natural because of their relationship. The disciples shared a close bond with Christ. There were things that they knew first-hand. This was their role, whether Christ would have pointed it out to them or not.

They were to be relied upon as witnesses because each of them was a disciple by conviction. Christ compelled no man to follow Him; He simply offered the invitation. They responded voluntarily and remained by choice. There is no witnessing quite as effective as the evidence offered by such people.

They were to be reckoned as witnesses because once a man has come to know Christ he just can't be quiet. Christians were never meant to be the silent type.

So the story has been told, generation after generation, against the hostile world. How effective it has been or is depends upon our response to the witness God gives us - - - and how well we share with others what we know to be true.

June 10, 1962

"WHOM GOD DISTURBS"

The sermon for this day bears the title, "Whom God Disturbs." It is based upon the Epistle for the day, and the text, verses 1 and 2 from the second chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.
And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting."

You have to read this first verse before you read the second verse for more reasons than one. You must recognize immediately that in the first verse you have a picture of a group of Christians which is a picture of complete tranquility, unity and fellowship. The verse puts it, very clearly - - "they were all with one accord in one place." - - one mind - - one spirit.

(This isn't the way they always were. Saints just don't drop down from heaven, fully fashioned, in complete Christian character. You don't get a saint by having the heavens part, and then suddenly, right in front of you, you get everything in one moment, of all that a Christian is, should and would be. You have to grow Christians. Whenever they achieve anything that resembles sainthood, it's because they've gone through a long process of becoming a Christian. There is no such thing as "instant" Christianity.)

"- - when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place - - "....and over against this picture of calm and tranquility we ought to take a look at them as they once were, even when our Lord was here on earth and called together twelve disciples, He called together twelve different people....

...each one wanting to be a bishop, each one wanting to be a
leader in his own right

...each one with his own particular temperament and personality

....each one, if you please, with his own inborn prejudice and
lack of trust for other people

....each one wanting to have an advantage over the rest of them

--in fact, if you read Scripture carefully, you come upon this very
troublesome page, where it says there was a strife among the dis-
ciples--a family quarrel within the company of Christians. Somehow
or another, it occurred to three disciples at least that if they
would be quick enough and seize the moment, they might be able, in
the day of the Kingdom, to have a superior place....

..this was the kind of stuff of which disciples are made!

- - people who do want to have an edge on somebody else!
- - people who, if there is a plum to be passed out, want to
make sure that they get it before somebody else!

Don't you think for a single minute that our Lord had an easy time guiding and
directing the destiny of the twelve men who constituted the disciple band. He
had to anticipate their fears, He had always to deal with their prejudices and
their unwillingness to accept each other. The ugliness of human nature has a
way of cropping out even in Christians - - even in disciples.

But if you think our Lord had a time of it when He was with them for three
years, think what their life must have been like after the crucifixion. Oh, He
did come back, occasionally, and appear before this group of disciples, and ~~that~~
group of disciples, and maybe every now and then He appeared to all of them when
they were assembled together; and when He did, He gave them a directive....He
said - - "Now you stay in Jerusalem....you stick together until the day of
Pentecost comes!"

...that's what He was referring to when His suggestion was, His firm demand:

"You stay here together - - you wait!"

Now as they lived together in waiting, do you know what happened?

They had a period of time in which they emptied themselves of all the fear and mistrust that they had of each other. The Scripture says, "When the day of Pentecost was fully come - - " ...then they were of one mind-- then they were of one spirit....

...but until then, I must think that that upper room where they gathered again and ever so often must have been like a veritable bee-hive. They had guilty consciences. They did not recall pleasantly all that they had done against their Lord and Master. And when one chap gets a guilty conscience, he starts dealing uneasily with his fellow men....

...Andrew, one of the disciples of course, and a brother of Simon Peter, was numbered in the entire company who all ran out on Jesus....and when I think of what happened in that upper room when they came together before Pentecost - -

...every now and then Andrew must have taken his brother, Simon Peter, to task and said...

"Simon Peter - - you, of all people, how could you have done it? Simon Peter, my brother, I'm ashamed of you! You made all those extravagant promises. You, Simon Peter, you were the one who was saying, 'Jesus, no matter what happens, I'll always be faithful.'....and you, Simon Peter, you're the man--by your own admission you've told us--that people came to you and said, 'Why you know Him!'

Simon Peter, you said you never knew Jesus Christ! - - "

....this was the kind of thing, you see, they had in their systems when they gathered together from the crucifixion, to the Ascension, to Pentecost....each one blaming the other.

Do you know what happens? After a while, when Christians live long enough

together under the influence of God, they can begin to accept each other in love. Charles Lamb was once heard to say - - "Do you see that fellow over there?--I don't like him!" And his friend said to him, "Did you ever spend any time with him? Do you really know him at all?" And with the honesty that became Charles Lamb, he said, "No, and I don't want to, because I'm afraid if I do I might learn to like him." Jesus Christ knew exactly what He was doing--of course He did, when He said to the disciples...

"Now you stick together. You may have the urge to separate---you may not find yourselves sitting comfortably in the presence of other people that you suspect, but you stick together!"

....that they remain together, by the blessing of God Himself, they begin to accept each other. It takes time to do this thing. Growth in Christian love requires continued fellowship, not separation.

If there were some way to do it, I'm inclined to think that if we could turn our assembly together right now, on a Sunday morning at 9:30 in Saint Luke Church, into a good old testimonial meeting, there might be some of you who would be willing to stand up and say - - "Yes, Pastor, I know exactly what you're talking about, because right in this room right now--why, I even see her!....there was a time, Pastor, when she got on my nerves...there was a time, Pastor, when she irritated and annoyed me. Pastor, now that we've been members together in Saint Luke Church these six years, these eight years, we've worked together on committees, we have learned to trust each other, we've learned to respect each other.....I know what you mean, Pastor! And this would never have happened, had I gone my way and gathered up my skirts and kept my distance. But as we remained together, as we grew together, we have learned to accept each other in love - - "and it takes time to do this.

Jesus Christ said....

"You stay in the upper room until you grow together as one
mind and one spirit - - "

Some of you might be willing to admit that you can remember days when you sat on a committee with certain people, and you had this personality conflict...but then you asked God to flood you with His Holy Spirit...and then you asked God to help you to accept that person in love....and the sun began to shine, not on that committee only, but on all of us.

They tell me that in some congregations it takes eight, ten, fifteen, twenty, years together to get going---maybe twenty-five or thirty...and then they establish a wonderful relationship in the Family - - everybody gets to know each other---they've grown together over a certain period of time and accept each other. And then do you know what happens? They reach a sad stage...
...when a new member comes on the horizon---when a Johnny-come-lately wants to be a part of it...

...they have such a wonderful working relationship together among themselves that they resent anybody from the outside coming in. Why, this has been known to happen in families, too.....a brother refusing to accept in love the new sister-in-law.....the mother unwilling to accept the new son-in-law - - "Why, it's taken us fifteen, twenty, thirty years to get our family together as a unit. It's a tightly knit corporation--we'd like to keep it this way!".....

....would you believe me if I were to tell you that that's just about what might have happened to the early Christians? After this period of time together in the upper room they began to accept each other. They enjoyed the peace, the quiet and the calm that they had, and they were quite content to let the rest of the world go by"We have our own pleasant plateau---let's keep it that way!"

"And then when the day of Pentecost was come - - "
how do you read it? - - "

" - - there was a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind - - "
There was a disturbance. Most Christians would prefer to have God blow gently upon them...zephyr-like...the calm quiet peace of a summer's night. This is what most of us want from God. Most of us would much prefer to have anything except a violent disturbance. If you think that day of Pentecost was a bright pleasant summer's eve, you're mighty mistaken. They were so violently, divinely disturbed - - God shook them all up....

...that's the way you have to think of Pentecost - - it was

DIVINE DISTURBANCE

...and they were so shaken and so disturbed that they were driven from their meeting place. And I think I can tell you this, even though you may not wish to hear it - - in all likelihood, the group that had been there on the day of Pentecost never again assembled all together. This mighty rushing wind, this divine disturbance, this force from God drove them out into the world, and while they might have been united in spirit, they never again had the comfort and the quiet and the calm of being together, secluded from the world.

(God has a way of irritating, annoying us...God has a way of driving us, compelling us out into the world. You know what would have happened--of course you do!--had that handful of Christians remained in the upper room. You and I would never have known the Christian Church....had that handful of Christians remained in the upper room, undisturbed by any divine force, they would have been just a group of people looking at each other, admiring each other, saying nice things about each other, and letting the rest of the world run its own wicked course, without any concern on their part.)

(When the day of Pentecost was fully come, God disturbed them, God drove them out of the upper room - - God put them out into the street - - God sent them out into all parts of the world. They had to go where the lame, the bruised, the unattractive and the unlovely were. They had to go where people were to be found who were alien to their spirit. This is the true picture of the Christian Church:

A group of gathered people? No!

A group of scattered people, Spirit-possessed? Yes.)

If I really wanted a picture of Saint Luke Church, I wouldn't get a photographer to come and take your picture here, quietly, composed together, with a look of peace upon your face on a Sunday morning...

....precious as next Sunday will be, when you come to kneel before the altar, I'm not so sure that I'd want a photographer getting a picture of you as you kneel to receive the Sacrament...and I would say to myself--this is the picture of my people, a people of God, the Christian Church - - ?

What, then, is the picture?

There would be two pictures in this album of the Christian Church:

...one would be a picture of you as an individual, somewhere being vexed and disturbed somehow, by the thought that there are unsaved people....being vexed and disturbed and annoyed and irritated by the thought that there are the world's hungry, the underfed, the ill-clad, the lonely, the discouraged...

Then my second picture would be, if I could choose pictures for my album of the Christian Church....first the disturbed soul - -

...the second would be a picture of you alongside of someone who isn't nearly as decent as you, who isn't nearly as attractive as you think

you are, and probably are!...standing alongside of a sinner, with all the stain and soil of Satan's face upon him.

...that's what the Christian Church really is - - Spirit-possessed people who traffic with the world....Spirit-possessed people who turn their back upon an altar---who are driven into the lives of other people, the unattractive and the alien in spirit. (Whatever picture you may have of the Christian Church, my friend, if you think it's one of peace, composure and tranquility, you're mistaken....for God is essentially the Vexer of people's souls, the Disturber of their minds, the Troubler of their hearts.

I can understand why I would pray in your behalf, even as I would pray for myself....

"Breathe upon us, O Lord, Thy hallowed calm, soothe the anxieties of our minds, ease the burden from our hearts and bring peace to our souls - - "

...I can understand that kind of a prayer....

...but I can also understand a far nobler prayer at times, when a man would be inclined to say....

"God, I'm too comfortable in the Christian Church.

God, I'm not worrying enough about other people, whether they're fed or whether they're not fed; whether they're lonely or whether they're not lonely. I'm not worrying enough about people, whether they're lost or saved.

God, you'd better disturb me.

God, you'd better get a hold of me.

God, you'd better drive me in their direction, because

I'm not inclined to go that way myself."

...If you've never prayed that kind of a prayer, may I encourage you to do it, because this is the kind of a prayer, perhaps, the Christian Church needs most to offer before the Throne of Grace...

....and not until you've prayed that kind of a prayer and go out and face people where they are do you deserve to ask God for the peace that the world can't give.)

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded.)

June 24, 1962

"IN MANY CONVINCING WAYS"

The sermon today bears the title, "In Many Convincing Ways" and the text is the 3rd verse of the first chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God."

Since last Fall the sermons that have been preached from this pulpit have been, for the most part, based upon passages of Scripture from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. Today's sermon is the last in that series, and significantly enough, it takes as its text one of the first verses in the first chapter in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. And what you really have in this first, second or third verse of the first chapter is what the writer of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles wants to be recognized as the theme of the entire book: Jesus Christ is alive.

When I was a student at seminary we had a venerable professor, Dr. John Aberly, who shared with us a custom that he had observed for a good many years. Whenever he read a book and concluded one chapter, before going on to the next chapter he would say to himself, now just what was the theme of this chapter that I have read? What was the author trying to tell me? Then, as best he could, he would distill into one or two sentences which he would write with his frail hand at the end of the chapter as a synopsis of that part of the book; and when he came to the last chapter, he would say to himself, now what has been the theme of the whole book?and then in a sentence or two, in his own words, he would say what the book had said to him.

I come to you this morning saying to you, that having studied very vigor-

ously the Book of the Acts of the Apostles in preparation for one sermon after another having been preached from this pulpit since last September, that there is no question in my mind - - this is the theme of themes - - the Book of the Acts of the Apostles is saying to us: Jesus Christ is alive. It was because the people in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles believed this that in chapter after chapter in this book you discover men and women whose lives are being transformed. The Book of the Acts is the record of changed men, changed because they have come under the power and the conviction, by the Holy Spirit, that Jesus Christ is alive right now. This, by the way, is part of the unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

What is distinctive in Christianity? - - the living reality of Jesus Christ now! There are those in this world, and if you make a study of the history of the great religions, there are those who will say to you that there have been many prophets since the dawn of time.....

...now Jesus Christ is a prophet, but if you say He is a prophet and you stop at that point, then you make Him just one prophet among many prophets. Even though you may name Him the chief of the prophets, He is still a prophet...

....but Jesus Christ is more than a prophet.

A study of the history of the great religions of the world will introduce you to many great teachers of religion and they have left their mark upon man's history.

...and you will say, this is what Jesus was--a great teacher. But if you say Jesus Christ was only a teacher, then no matter where you may put Him among the great teachers of the world, He still remains nothing but a teacher....

Part of the unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ goes beyond the fact that He was a teacher...a prophet. He is the Saviour of the world....

who lived....

who died.....

who arose from the dead....

...in order to accomplish once and forever the perfect act of redemption. This is the unique revelation of God in Christ: that He who came to earth in the flesh is alive - - now - - and forevermore.

I read a very interesting thing about something that happened back in the 1920's. A Russian by the name of Bucharin made a trip from Moscow to Kiev; and he made the trip for only one reason--to ridicule the Christian Church. He represented an anti-God movement. He was a very, very clever and a very able man. He had succeeded in gathering together a large assembly of people, and because he was both learned and clever, it looked as though he had taken every stone from the edifice of this thing called Christianity and had reduced it to practically nothing. You know, there are men who can argue that way... And when he finished, someone asked for the right to speak. It was a priest of the Greek Orthodox Church.

He walked from where he had been sitting. He came up and stood directly alongside of Bucharin, the ridiculer of the Christian religion. And as he stood alongside of the ridiculer, with complete serenity he looked over the vast assembly...and then he did a truly tremendous, dynamic thing--absolutely eloquent. Do you know what it was?.....

...well, let me tell you first of all that when the

festival of Easter is celebrated in the Greek

Orthodox Church and the congregation has assembled,

...the first words that are proclaimed by the Greek

Orthodox priest to the congregation:

"The Lord is risen!"

and immediately the entire congregation responds:

"The Lord is risen indeed!"

This Greek Orthodox priest, standing there alongside of Bucharin--who cleverly and skillfully had torn Christianity to bits, so he thought.....this Greek Orthodox priest simply said to the assembly of people:

"The Lord is risen!"

...and like the thunder of the sea, the crash of a mighty wave, they responded:

"The Lord is risen indeed!"

Nothing else was said. There was no reply that could be made.

This is the evidence which is unanswerable.

For there are those of us who know in our hearts that Jesus Christ is alive.

This is the crowning glory of our faith.

It isn't much of a job to convince people that once upon a time Jesus
Christ lived.....

It isn't much of a job to tell people about the good old days in
Palestine.....

We can paint - - we can paint the pictures in the stained glass....

We can carve our figures into wood....

We can write our hymns....

We can talk a great deal about Jesus Christ who lived long, long ago...

...but after the resurrection Jesus Christ came straight into the heart of men and women, not to talk about the past, but to say - - "I am here--now! - - I am alive, and alive forevermore!"

That's why some of you may remember what I tried to do in one of those meditations on Good Friday, when I told you that the cross on the altar in Saint Luke Church is an empty cross, a radiant cross, the cross of the glorified Christ. It is not a crucifix. We will not permit ourselves to believe that we worship a Christ who died. We worship the Christ who left the cross empty, because as we recite so triumphantly in the creed:

" - - he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified,
dead and buried, and on the third day he rose again
from the dead - - "

...we keep saying to ourselves:

He is alive, and He sits in Heaven above at the
right hand of God the Father
- - and we know exactly what He's doing and
why He's doing it.

Well that's why when Jesus Christ came back He appeared to His disciples, and as the record puts it, He gave them convincing proofs that He was alive. Now I ask you, do you know what those convincing proofs were? It may not be an easy thing for you to name all the proofs that Jesus Christ gave of the fact that He was no longer dead but that He was alive. During a forty-day period He came back again and ever so often to them, but only for one purpose - - to let them know that He was alive.

....once He came to two lonely men walking toward the sunset.

- - and that's what happens to people who feel as though

Christ is dead. Their sun has already begun to set.

And as they walked away from Jerusalem in disillusionment,
Christ himself drew near to them, and before the evening was
over, to them He gave convincing proof, and they knew that
He was alive.....

....once there was a man, and the older I become the more I

appreciate the integrity of his doubt....once there was a man
by the name of Thomas, who laid down a certain statement
and said, "Unless I am convinced, I will not believe - - "
...and of all things, to that man Jesus Christ came - -
for only one purpose: to give him convincing proof.

...In the disillusionment of two men on the way to Emmaus

...In the doubt of a man who had been a disciple

...In the despair of a certain handful of men who went back to their daily work
and they couldn't quite make their daily work jell - -

...they just couldn't put their heart into their daily work
without Christ, and to them Jesus Christ came and stood
by the shore until they were made aware of His presance...

Their lives then were transformed.

Now you ask me - - Pastor, how does it happen?

Christ suits the path that He takes to the need of your soul.

He may not come to you as He comes to me. But He will come.

He may allow you a certain circumstance in life that I may never know. But

if through that certain circumstance Jesus Christ becomes more real
to you, then that's the path that Jesus Christ is taking into
your heart, that you may know that He is alive.

I learn many things from my barber, who doesn't pretend to be a learned
man, who doesn't pretend to be a theologian. But the other day he said to me,
as he recalled his war years, "Do you know what, Pastor? I think it's a good
thing for every man to have a brush with death." And I knew exactly what he
meant. While he didn't put it in so many words, I am convinced at least that

he has an awareness of God that he might otherwise not have known. God came to him in that way. With all my heart I believe that God wants to come directly into your heart. And He wants you to know the joy of believing that Jesus Christ is alive. Now how He may come, I don't know, but I must ask you the question--don't you ask me 'how will He come, Pastor,' - - but let me ask you this question: do you really want Him to come?

would you treasure the thought of thoughts that
Jesus Christ is alive?

Two men, friends of long years, were standing by a reservoir. And in the course of their conversation they became theologically oriented. The one said to his friend, "I have to admit, God isn't very real to me. It's an abstract notion that I have; but to talk about a personal God, and to feel that Jesus Christ is alive in my heart now - - it just doesn't make much sense. It's dim--it's misty." And without saying a word this friend of his of long standing took him and grabbed him by the head and put his head under water, and held him there, as his friend struggled for air. And then he released him.

Dazed, of course, by this kind of treatment, he was quickly brought back to his senses when his friend said to him, "Let me tell you one thing - - when the day comes that you will hunger for the reality of God as much as you struggle for air right now, then God will become a reality for you." The prophet is perfectly right when he says:

"If with all your heart you truly seek him,
you will surely find him."

Jesus Christ appeared to people and gave them convincing proof. And who were they? They were people who wanted to be made aware of His presence. They were people who felt that they could not live without the thought of God in their

hearts. These are the ones who were convinced. They are the ones who were transformed.

Every now and then I ask myself a question which I think any man ought to ask himself.....

how long might I live?

how long might I serve you people as your Pastor?

And God has a way of saying to me - - you ask the wrong question!

It isn't, how long might you live? It isn't, how long might you serve?

...it's whether or not, long or late, you are able to share with people the conviction that Jesus Christ is alive in your heart.

Now in the plan of God the most convincing proof of proofs that Jesus Christ is alive is to be found - - dare I say it? - - in people

....like you, and like me....

And when the day should come that I should preach my last sermon to you, and you might ever recall this one who stood in the pulpit, you might say to yourself - - "There's no question about it--Jesus Christ was very

real to him."

I can say that about some of you,

and that's another reason why I believe it.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

July 8, 1962

"THE SOUL SEEKER"

The sermon is based upon the Gospel lesson for the day and it bears the title, "The Soul Seeker"; and the text is the first verse of that Gospel lesson, the first verse of the 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"Then drew near unto him all the
publicans and sinners to hear
him."

It was just like the physician turned writer, wasn't it--for Luke was a physician, you see, now a writer of the Gospel record---to make note of the fact that someone ought to pay special attention to all of these people who came to hear Jesus Christ preach and teach. There's no question about it, pre-eminent for us should always be the preacher and the teacher as we think of Jesus Christ. But every now and then, for our sake at least, we ought to take a good long look at the people who came to hear Him preach and teach. In this waiting room of the Great Physician you found those who were unattractive--are the sick and the diseased ever attractive?...these people who came to hear Jesus Christ preach....

...people in His day referred to them simply as "publicans
and sinners".....the outcasts, the scum of the earth....
...if you and I were hard-pressed for adjectives, we might rely upon such descriptives as these.....

....the people who came to hear Jesus Christ preach were the sickly
ones, the uncertain ones, the hurt people---the damaged lot
of humanity....the ones who are afraid--afraid to live.

And they had their reasons for being afraid to live. For on the other side of humanity were the self-righteous people, the scribes and Pharisees who made goodness a business. Why, they never broke the law--they couldn't afford to

break the law....their reputation was at stake! And these people who were so good were always looking down their noses at all the rest of the people who seemed forever to be breaking the law. They just couldn't be good, no matter how hard they tried. And as far as the scribes and Pharisees were concerned, these publicans and sinners deserved to go to hell, and the sooner they got to hell, the better off the world would be.

Now against this kind of background you have these people living daily---
--the publicans and the sinners...the hurt, the damaged lot of humanity....

...can't you see at once what happens to a human soul when it has to live against that kind of background?--always moving against people who shake their finger at them and say..."You are the wicked one, you are the sinner, you are the scum of the earth...hell exists for you---why don't you go where you belong?"

...now because they were treated that way by the scribes and the Pharisees they were afraid to live, and they remained the shaky ones, the uncertain ones, the hurt ones....

...until one day there loomed upon the horizon an itinerant preacher, and he began telling people the wonderful story of God's love. While the people in the church repelled the sinners, there was something about Jesus Christ that attracted them. It's high time that you ask yourself the question, just what was it that brought these people--the motley bunch, the unattractive ones---what was it that brought them to Jesus Christ?for attract them He did. Luke, the physician turned writer, makes note of it, that those who waited in the room of the Great and Good Physician were far from being attractive people.

I think they were drawn to Jesus Christ for this one reason in particular: that when He encountered them He did not begin by denunciation. Or, if I may put it for you in words that you would much more prefer, He didn't begin by blaming them....He didn't begin by saying, "Aha, if you would only have kept my command-

ments, this would never have happened to you. You see, this is what happens to those of you who are bad! Now you come to experience the just desert of your soul!....

.....He did not begin that way.

You never win friends for the Kingdom by denunciation. You never make a person want to love God by shaking a finger in his face and in a self-righteous way saying, "Sinner!Sinner!Sinner!" No, there's a better way than that. Sinner though you may be, there's a better way. And this was the preferred method of Jesus Christ. He told them stories of God's love. When He spoke to them it was like holding a mirror in front of them, and as He related one truth after another, they caught the reflection of their own wicked souls as He told the story of God's wonderful love. That's exactly what He did. For sinners, the message that they need most to hear, at the beginning, is not God's wrath, but God's love.

Years ago, as a student in the Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, our professor in Practical Theology told us about the young pastor who was called upon to conduct a funeral service for someone in Skid Row in Chicago. To conduct a funeral service for someone who had died, presumably now, (so quick we are to judge) the life of the reprobate! ...and whoever might come to the funeral would be people of like kin, similar spirit, made over the same wicked pattern. The temptation came to this preacher, so Dr. Hoover told us, to preach upon the wrath of God. He'd have a captive audience. Let him now spell out for these people, sinners that they were, the judgment of God.But to the contrary, said our professor in Practical Theology, the young preacher said to himself....

"Me....tell them about Judgment!

Me....tell them about the wrath of God!

Me....tell them the way life can deal cruelly with them!

....and they with life!

Ah, no! " said he, "They know all about the pangs of hell.

Don't they live in it? Aren't they the inhabitants of hell here on earth? No..." said the preacher, "I shall talk to them about God's love. I shall talk to them about God's proffered gift of forgiveness!"

...and so he did. And so, I say to you, must we!...in all our dealings with the scum of the earth.

....talk about hell? They know it better than you and I!

.....When Jesus Christ came into the lives of these people, He did not begin by denunciation. He began by relating one story after another, holding this mirror in front of them, they caught something of the reflection of their own lives.

In this magnificent 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke He told three stories, one after the other. Let me remind you of them:

The one story was the story of a man who had one hundred sheep. And one of these sheep, says the Master Story-teller, went astray. And Jesus says the shepherd went looking for that sheep, that one sheep, until he found it.....and then there was joy in Heaven over one sinner that was restored---one sheep that was returned.

Now do you suppose that's all that Jesus told in that story?--This is the abbreviated edition, you know. I'm inclined to think that when He told that story He looked at His little audience and He said, with a kind of a wink in His eye...

"Now you all know how sheep go astray, don't you?..."

(Ah, this was the thing that brought comfort to them, I think)

"You all know how sheep go astray? Sheep go astray because it begins to nibble this blade of grass that's in front of it, and then it nibbles the next blade of grass, and then the next blade of grass, and eventually, you see, it finds itself separated..

...sheep do not stray because they are willful and deliberate. look into any sheep's face and you can find that out for yourself. They do not stray because they are willful and deliberate---they stray because they are blind and they are foolish and they concern themselves only with the thing in front of them at the particular moment!..."

Don't you see what happens now?...when Jesus Christ talks like this, all of these sinners in front of Him, here and there you get a person who says, "Why, that's exactly the way it was with me! I never meant to become as bad as I am! I never meant to go as far away from the Kingdom of God as I did! This was no willful, deliberate attempt on my part...but like sheep who go astray, I found myself separated from the company of the redeemed!"

...don't you see what this did to the hearts and souls of men?--to have someone stand in their midst.....first of all to begin by saying, "I am here to offer you my love---I am not here to sit in judgment upon you, and what is more, I understand exactly why you're as wicked as you are."

....this is the thing, after all, that most of us crave, isn't it?--to be understood....not necessarily to have someone condone us in our sin, but if only we can find someone who understands how we got to be as sinful as we are!....

And then He went on to tell them another story. You see, this is what He did---just unfolded for them picture after picture of God's love.....and He told the story of the woman who had ten silver coins. No doubt her husband, on their wedding night, gave her these ten silver coins and she strung them and they were part of her head-dress.....and one day, busy about the house, one of these coins became detached and was lost.....

....and as He told this story, don't you think there were people in His audience who said, "Why, that's just the way I became lost, too....not through any fault of

my own, but because of the circumstances that surrounded me. I did not stray from God - - I did not become separated from God because I designed it that waybut because of the circumstances of which I had been part, there is now this detachment."

I know exactly what you're thinking. You're saying, "Hold on, Pastor. You're being far too gracious. You're being far too easy. You're taking an entirely too naive point of view of life! Not all the wickedness in the world results just because people stray! Not all of the wickedness is a result of people who are the victims of circumstances. Pastor, there are people who stoutly defy God! There are people who are willful and deliberate!"

And you know what? I hear the voice of Jesus Christ saying....

"You are absolutely right! because to these people in the long ago I also told them the story, my last story, the third story out of this little chain of stories....I told them the story of a man who had two sons....and one of these sons as as head-strong as they come....and one of these sons made up his mind - - carefully planned it that way--thought it all through---knew exactly what he was doing.....he turned his back upon his father's house." Jesus said, "There are people like that, too."

I don't think He said...

"Maybe right here in my little congregation this morning some of you are the sinners that you are because you've been willful and you've been deliberate and you have stoutly defied God - - "

....I don't think He said that.....

....He didn't have to!

The point could be made of its own strength.

Now Jesus Christ came into the lives of these people - -

the hurt...

the damaged...

the disappointed....

the people who are afraid to go on living because no one

gave them any encouragement, and they were always

dealing with people who had wiped them off the books...

- - and one day Jesus Christ comes into their life.

Do you know for a fact that the unique contribution of the Christian religion may lie in this very realm: that God in Heaven above is not content to wait for sinners to come to Him, but the God whom we know in Jesus Christ is a God who comes to us....seeking the sinner....offering the sinner the love of God. This is the kind of God we Christians have! - -

...a God who doesn't stand on the side

but a God who comes to us and is the great wooper of the
human heart.....

...no wonder our ancestors wrote that hymn,

"Jesus, Lover of My Soul" - - because that's precisely
what He is.

Let me share with you a story that was told by Dr. Joseph Forte Newton, one of Philadelphia's finer preachers of a generation ago, and quite a columnist in his own right. He used to relate this story, a true story, that came out of Tennessee. In years gone by, a band of Indians raided a white settlement. They killed practically every white man who was there. But for some strange reason they took captive a handful of boys. And they took these boys to live with the Indians.

It so happens that the two mothers of these boys never gave up hope, fer-

vently believing that some day they would find their young children, even if they became men in the course of the years, alive. Dr. Newton used to tell how the white men would make one raid after another on this Indian tribe, and after each raid these mothers came and they would look at the captives that they brought back from the Indians, hoping and praying that perhaps one of the captives could be their son. After one of these raids the mothers came and they were shown two men, with near-white skin, but something of the wild in their eyes and in their faces.

One of the mothers, with maternal instinct, I presume, forced herself to believe that one of these could be hers. But there is no sign of recognition, no response. And then the commanding officer suggested, and a very clever thing it was - - "Why don't you sing a song that you used to sing to your children when they were young? Maybe this will be the spark." ...and she began to croon the lullaby by which she put her children to sleep. For a moment, no response. And she went on singing tenderly.and then one of these men, with the near-white skin, yet with the look of the wild upon his face, walked slowly, cautiously, toward her. She continued singing.the story ends with the man throwing himself upon the shoulder of his mother and crying tears of joy.

It's a parable I tell you: God never gives up hope for those of us who are taken captive by the world. God sends His Son Jesus Christ into the world---looking for us wherever we may be. And always in His heart is the song of Heaven...

....and every now and then, there are people like you and people like me who respond

...for God and the human soul were meant for each other, and as far as Jesus Christ is concerned, nothing, absolutely nothing - - can ever cut asunder the bond of love which God keeps inviolate for you and for me.

....and if that isn't enough to cure damaged souls and hurt hearts, then I just don't know what is.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded.)

"IN GOD'S GENEROUS WAY"

Text: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful"
(Luke 6:36)

It's in the very nature of this verse of scripture to either attract men to the Christian faith, or to drive them from it. It can have an amazing effect upon us, one way or another. The text, therefore, demands respect. Let us see what it says.

In simple, direct language it lays down a course of action, a way of living, and provides the justification for what it recommends. It states that Christians are people who must deal mercifully with others. That means even though they do not deserve to be treated with kindness, we are to be kind to them just the same. In this recommendation we are given to understand that we are to be merciful - - now justice is one thing, but mercy is another. Justice we might be able to go for - - but mercy? We say in our kind of world it just doesn't pay off. Nonetheless, the Scriptures can't be tampered with. The text says exactly what it says, and any attempt on our part to make it say less will prove futile, as it should. Let us see now what we can make of it.

Well, this much has to be said at once - - Christ gives His followers no choice. It is a command, you know. He doesn't say - "If it seems reasonable to you - - if, by any chance you should be disposed toward kindness, let me suggest that you give it more than ordinary consideration - - " There's no talking like that whatsoever. As explicitly as possible, standing out in clear, bold relief are His words: "BE MERCIFUL - - " and what is more - - we are to be merciful - - as merciful as God is merciful. That, too, makes it

all the more difficult - - because it is one thing to be merciful, but to be as merciful as God is - - well, who can achieve a standard such as that? Again let it be said, we can't tamper with Scripture. The text adds the qualifying phrase, and that's that!

What we are really dealing with, as you will admit, is the Christian ethic. In fact the entire setting of the text is found in Christ's blue-print for behaviour as He outlined it in His sermon from the mountain.

We notice several things. First off we are impressed with the accent on the positive. Christ's edict is a clear enunciation of something to be done. It does not consist in a listing of things that shouldn't be done. Whether one approaches life from the positive or the negative can make a great deal of difference. William Barclay in his helpful Bible Studies reminds us that "Jesus gave us the Golden Rule which bids us do to others as we would have them to do us. That rule exists in many writers of many creeds in its negative form. Hillel, one of the great Jewish rabbis, was asked by a man to teach him the whole law while he stood on one leg. He answered, "What is hateful to thee, do not to another. That is the whole law and all else is explanation." Philo, the great Jew of Alexandria, said: "What you hate to suffer, do not do to anyone else." Isocrates, the Greek orator, said, "What things make you angry when you suffer them at the hands of others, do not you do to other people." The Stoics had as one of their basic rules, "What you do not wish to be done to yourself, do not you do to any other." When Confucius was asked, "Is there one word which may serve as a rule of practice for all one's life?" he answered, "Is not Reciprocity such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others." Everyone of these forms is negative. It is not unduly difficult to keep oneself from such action; but it is a very different thing to

go out of your way to do to others what you want them to do to you. The very essence of Christian conduct is that it does not consist in not doing bad things, but in actively doing good things."

Try as we may, we cannot ignore the emphasis upon the positive which in turn makes it all a matter of resolute will. Again, yes frequently so, we are confronted by the call to march -- to advance. We are to initiate the course of action and it is always to be beneficial. Sometimes it is the hardest thing in the world to take initiative in goodness, especially when there's little likelihood that we'll be appreciated or that even the favor will be returned. There is always the hesitation: how do I know that my benevolence will not be wasted? Is there anything as pathetic as wasted goodness? So we are quick to reason -- or is the word rationalize? On the other hand goodness which is hoarded, selfishly retained, is tragic. The great adventure is forever a great risk, but when it is the adventure of love and of mercy it is a grand and glorious risk. Life goes on because it is being taken daily. Every time a child is conceived and born the risk is experienced all over again. How can a parent know whether or not the child will return the love and kindness showered upon it in its formative years? The saddest creature in the world is the mother who loves her children with reservation and cautious, selfish hesitation.

The part of the text that causes us the greater difficulty is this business of being as merciful as God. It's hard enough as it is to accept the basic notion of mercy, but to put it into practice as God administers it -- seems to be well beyond our reach.

So the critic of Christianity makes fun of us, and the old line is used that we Christians are so unrealistic. Why do you, they say to us, even talk about a standard that is impossible? You Christians, they go on to charge, talk

out of both sides of your mouth: on one hand you call yourselves poor, miserable sinners and on the other hand you talk about becoming perfect as the Father in Heaven is perfect! The two don't go together.

It is not fair for them to think they can let the matter rest at that point once they raise the critic's voice. There is something they should hear us say. We who are called by Christ's name are the first to admit that we are sinners, but since we have come to know the saving grace of Christ we refuse to level off the years that remain to us on that score. Sinners we are, but we shall, thanks to God, strive for a better day, a better lot. And the standard we shall use must of necessity be above and beyond us. That's why our Blessed Lord goes on to say in the full setting of our text something about blind being unable to lead the blind. Sinners need to be guided and challenged by someone or something that is far ahead of them. The temptation, however, is always there for us to use a lesser standard, an easier one. In doing so, what hope can there be for us and for our world.

Let me remind you of A. J. Gossip's words on this matter as included in a sermon entitled: "What Christ Means By a Good Man": - -

"The truth is, says Christ, that what is wrong is that you are all using far too low a standard, with the result that you are much too quickly satisfied. It is not nearly enough to be just; though even that, God knows, is hard to practice; or to claim no more than your bare dues; or to pay your fellows their full rights; or to deal with men as they deserve. All that is far less than your bounden duty. When you use such things as your scale of measurements you are taking custom, or the conventions, or other people round about, or at the best the worthiest of them, as your index of how you ought to live and what you ought to be. And none of these will do. For your standard is God. For you to live deliberately on a lower plane than God is failure. And look

yonder! there is an open sinner; yet you see the sunshine does not skip his fields! And there a scandalously immoral man; yet on his craft the rains fall just as healingly as upon any others. And you, too, in God's generous way must blot out enmity however well deserved as men judge things, and must forget ingratitude, and must meet rank unworthiness and worse with a queer stubborn love that keeps on obstinately loving in spite of everything. So only shall you prove yourselves the children of that Father who, whatever you have done, still unaccountably persists in loving you.

But who is sufficient for these things? Like some barbarian looking into Plato, aye, far more confusedly, so do I peer into the mind of Christ, as at a thing how far beyond and above me as yet. Only, you remember Bunyun, how the evangelist asked, "Do you see yonder wicked gate?" And the man answered, "No, I don't." "Well, do you see that shining light," he was next asked, and he replied, "I think I do." "Keep that light in your eye, and you will reach the goal in time," so he was told. Let us, too, keep our eyes on Christ and follow Him on to the end of all we see to be His will, as that will become ever fuller to us. And in us also it will come true at last."

* * *

Illustration

Maxim Gorky in one of his works shares with his readers the dialogue between Luka, a good old man, and his grand-daughter Natasha - -

LUKA: - "Treat every one with friendliness - - injure no one."

NATASHA: - "How good you are, grandfather! How is it that you are so good?"

LUKA: - "I am good, you say. Nyah - if it is true, all right. But you see, my girl - there must be someone to be good. We must have pity on mankind. Christ, remember, had pity for us all and so taught us. Have pity when there is still time, believe me, that is right. I was once, for example, employed as a watchman, at a country place which belonged to an engineer, not far from the city of Tomsk, in Siberia. The house stood in the middle of the forest, an out-of-the-way location; and it was winter and I was all alone in the country-house. It was beautiful there - magnificent! And once - - I heard them scrambling up.

NATASHA: - "Thieves?"

LUKA: - "Yes. They crept higher, and I took my rifle and went outside. I looked up - two men, opening a window, and so busy that they did not see anything of me at all. I cried to them: Hey there, get out of that! And what do you think? They fell on me with a hand ax. I warned them. Halt, I cried, or else I fire. Then I aimed first at one and then at the other. They fell on their knees saying, Pardon us! I was pretty hot on account of the hand ax, you remember. You devils, I cried, I told you to clear out and you didn't. And now, I said, one of you go into the brush and get a switch. It was done. And now, I commanded, one of you stretch out on the ground, and the other thrash him. And so they whipped each other at my command. And when they had each a sound beating, they said to me: Grandfather, for the sake of Christ give us a piece of bread. We haven't a bite in our bodies. They, my daughter, were the thieves who had fallen upon me with the hand ax. Yes, they were a pair of splendid fellows. I said to them, If you had asked for bread! Then they answered: We had gotten past that. We had asked and asked, and nobody would give us anything. Endurance was worn out. Nyah - and so they remained with me the whole winter. One of them, Stephen by name, liked to take the rifle and go into the woods. And the other, Jakoff, was constantly ill, always coughing. The three of us watched the place, and when spring came, they said, Farewell, grandfather, and went away - to Russia."

NATASHA: - "Were they convicts, escaping?"

LUKA: - "They were fugitives - they had left their colony. A pair of splendid fellows. If I had not had pity on them - who knows what would have happened? They might have killed me? Then they would be taken to court again - put in prison, sent back to Siberia - why all that? You can learn nothing good in prison, nor in Siberia. But a man, what can he not learn!"

"THE BIG FISHERMAN"

The sermon bearing the title, "The Big Fisherman" is based upon the Gospel lesson for the day and the text is the 8th verse of the 5th chapter of Luke:

"When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Pray tell, what is the connection between a man catching a sight of a huge haul of fish and then falling before Jesus Christ and saying "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man"? What possible connection, what possible relation can there be between fishing and a man's confessing his sin? And why title this sermon "The Big Fisherman" when you've just finished saying that Simon Peter was humbled before the Lord? This is the kind of question you ought to be asking yourself at once. And if such should be the question in your mind, let us now consider the facts in the case.

Jesus was now the popular preacher. No matter where He went, His reputation preceded Him; and people, so it seemed, came from all sides to hear Him preach. On this occasion the crowd was so great that it seemed wise to Him to get into a man's boat and to push out a bit from the shore, and there He could better address all of these people who came to hear Him preach. Now, as you well know, Jesus Christ owned no earthly possessions; and even on this occasion He had to borrow something from someone. It was Peter's boat that He borrowed, that He might use it as a pulpit.

The sermon was preached. And when Jesus Christ finished preaching He did a decidedly interesting thing.....He somehow looked into the face of Simon Peter, and He caught in the face of Simon Peter anxiety and distress.....

(now if I were preaching this sermon to a group of preachers, right

now I would say to each one of them - - "Preacher, take note!
- - any sermon that you preach ought to always end with your
looking into the face of an individual.....sermons should
never be preached broadside - - at the ultimate conclusion
there should always be the confrontation of a single soul-")
....and Jesus Christ looked now, having finished His sermon, into the face of
one man. And as He looked into the face of Simon Peter He discovered that an
unmet need remained. Here was a man anxious and disturbed. So I would say to
myself - - so I would take myself to task before God and you - - that in the
preaching of any sermon, if somehow there cannot be a kind of relatedness be-
tween what is being preached and what happens to be the need of your life, the
preaching of the sermon could well be in vain. So Jesus Christ looked into the
life of Simon Peter and discovered this anxiety and this distress.

And do you know what it was? Simon Peter made his living by catching fish;
and all night he had been out, and he came back without a single fish. In those
days without refrigeration, even today - - if you don't get a catch of fish to-
day, you can't possibly expect to have twice as good a catch tomorrow and then
sell twice as many fish to one customer. You see, fish are perishable....and in
a certain sense there isn't anything quite as perishable as the day when you catch
no fish, for the day has perished and the effort has been wasted, and you have
nothing productive whatsoever to show for it. So real was this problem in the
life of Simon Peter - a day without a return...an effort without a result - so
Jesus Christ says to Simon Peter - - "Simon Peter, try again. Launch out into
the deep - - let down your nets for a haul of fish."preacher's advice to a
fisherman.

And the fisherman's reaction was exactly what a fisherman's reaction ought
to be to a preacher who gives advice.....the record in the Bible is abbreviated,

of course - it has to be - and all that we have is Simon Peter turning to Jesus Christ and saying -- "Master, we toiled all night and we didn't take anything!"

...don't you think for a single minute that's all that Simon Peter said. Human being that he was, there was hesitation, there was an unwillingness to believe that what Jesus Christ was suggesting could be taken at its face value. After all, he was the fisherman, and he knew that fish were to be had at the night - - not in broad daylight....

...but there was something about Jesus Christ that commanded respect. And so Simon Peter does as Jesus Christ suggests.

Now you know how the story ends, don't you? They go out....they come back... ..the catch is so great that when they put the fish in their boats the boats begin to sink.....and Simon Peter, amazed, looks at the catch of fish, and says, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man." I frankly admit in your presence that for a number of years I was all too puzzled by this text. Again I say I just couldn't quite see the connection between fishing and an admission of guilt. But the more I ponder this text, and the more it is illuminated by the Holy Spirit, I am delighted to share with you that portion of the understanding of this text which has come to me. For you see all too frequently we are overwhelmed by the fact that here was the miracle of a great catch of fish.

But this is not the great miracle! The miracle is not to be found in the fish boats. The miracle is to be found in the heart of a fisherman. This is it; it was this moment of unwillingness on the part of Simon Peter to believe that Jesus Christ knew what He was talking about. This is how Simon Peter reacted to Jesus Christ--of course he did....because Simon Peter was just as human as you are... .."Why, Master, we're fishermen - -

Master, fishing is our businesslast night wasn't our first

night out! Why, we have been about this thing now for many years- -"

(and whether he said it or not, I don't know, but I have reason to believe that he thought it)

..."Master, you're a preacher!

You've been a carpenter's helper! ...you're a maker of
oxen yoke!

And you're telling us how to catch fish! You'd better
stick to preaching....."

....but Simon Peter, blessed be his name, recognized that there's a point beyond which human reason cannot go; and when confronted by Jesus Christ man is encouraged and invited to take the risk which is God, and to take Jesus Christ at His word.

For all the reason that you and I have that it may not work, there comes a time when a man ought to risk it God's way, and to believe Jesus Christ. This, I say to you, is the miracle! Because that's exactly what Simon Peter did. Contrary to all the procedures and the practices of the known fishermen, he goes beyond his own experience--he passes by his own wisdom, and he risks it God's way. That's the miracle!and Simon Peter knew it

....for when he looks at this huge haul of fish he says to himself--"and to think that I, Simon Peter, refused for a while to believe that Jesus Christ knew what he was talking about!"

....this is sin! - - for you and me to refuse to believe that Jesus Christ knows what is best. Sin, beloved, isn't simply in your not coming to church on any one given Sunday.....sin, beloved, isn't to be confined only to that cuss word that you let slip one time in great temper--sinful though it may be.....this is not the total story of sin.....

The real story of sin is your willful, deliberate refusal to believe

Jesus Christ - - your proud, vainful attempt to pit your wisdom

as over against His - - to presume that you know something better....

This is the essence of sin - -

to refuse, deliberately, willfully to hesitate to take

Jesus Christ at His word - -

...and all this became so real with Simon Peter....

"To think that I hesitated!..

to think that I doubted!

...to think that I almost kept this from happening!

.....I am a sinner, O God - - "

This is not only a story of the Sea of Galilee, my friends, this is something that has to deal with the whole sea of life! For you and I are the unproductive ones. You and I are the ones who toil so feverishly and so seldom have much to show in return. And then against this unproductiveness of your life comes Jesus Christ. And He says, "Try again." And the glory of it is that when He says "Try again", He also says "Try it my way....try again, but this time try it my way."

There is always hope, you see, when abroad throughout the world is Jesus Christ coming to you and to me in our distress and in our anxiety. What a wonderful thing to have a Saviour like that, who is always saying, "Try again" - - even though rigidly He says, "But this time try it my way." If you feel your life has yet to be miraculous maybe this is the reason: ...you're haunted by your hesitation to believe that Jesus Christ knows what is best.

Ah, but we called him the Big Fisherman, didn't we? Let's go back to that now, in closing. Why title ~~it~~ the sermon "The Big Fisherman"?- - - when you're talking about a man who was made humble and fell on his knees before Jesus Christ?call him the Big Fisherman, my friend, because in his humility his soul is enlarged, because he opened his heart to the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ...

.....and in the Kingdom of God only the humble become the giants.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

September 2, 1962

"THE CHRISTIAN WORKMAN"

The sermon bears the title "The Christian Workman" and the text is the 24th verse of the 6th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

"You cannot serve God and mammon - - "

As God gives me memory, I recall it, even though it happened a dozen and more years ago, as vividly as though it were last Sunday. For some months workmen had been engaged in renovating the church. The Sunday for re-dedication had come. We thought it would be a very proper thing to invite, on the first service of the Sunday of re-dedication, all the workmen who had been involved in the project.

So the invitation went out. And when that Sunday came the front part of the church was filled with electricians, carpenters, plasterers, plumbers...and there they were. It was on this side of the congregation that Henry Kauffeld sat. Now Henry was the master carpenter who with much diligence and devotion went about the days' work. About the third seat from the front, on the pulpit side, was Jim Stroup. I can still see Jim and his 180 pounds swinging on the cord and the wire that was to carry the lanterns, to make sure that Sunday by Sunday there would be a sufficient strength there to take care of the weight.

When it came time to preach the sermon I felt unduly constrained to make it very plain that while all of us understood that they were doing holy work when they were painting the interior walls of a church, that all of them were doing something very sacred in God's sight when they put the new altar in place...and so they had a right to be in church, and they had a right to feel that their hands were clean, that they had now offered something to God.....

....but I was conscience-stricken lest in the preaching of that sermon I should permit any of them to think

that their work thereafter, in the renovation of someone's home, in the renovation of someone's store-front, in the building of an apartment house....that their work thereafter or before would be something less holy in God's sight - - would be something less worthy of God's favor.

You see, this is the risk we always run: thinking that unless something specifically bears the name of God it is not holy.....that unless it is done for a certain specific purpose, glorifying God's name, it has less of a halo than something else that we might do.

There was a heresy in the Middle Ages, a heresy which has served as a curse upon succeeding generations. The church was foolish enough to permit people to think that there were different categories of labor acceptable in God's sight....

...that the highest of all things to be done for God was to

become a monk

...second best was to become a priest and serve a parish

...and as third-rate Christian endeavor - - a day's work by all the

rest of the people

Something of that idea still remains. There are some people who have a way of thinking that unless they become a pastor or a missionary they're not really serving God. The church now speaks properly about whole-life Christian service - - not so much full-time Christian service. The church now strikes the proper note of the Protestant Reformation that every man can be a priest before God, and he doesn't have to wear vestments like these.

I suppose that's one reason why I have never waxed too enthusiastic about putting somewhere in Saint Luke Church--in the narthex, in one of the corridors, a tablet designating the names of the five young men who have gone out into the ministry from this congregation. I just can't see getting a panel of photographs, as though we were giving a particular kind of halo to five men as over against all the

rest of the membership of the congregation. It is true, make no mistake about it, that society, as constituted today, needs men and women who will separate themselves from the ordinary work of life and give themselves to full-time Christian responsibility as pastors and missionaries, deaconesses, choirmasters, organists, directors of youth work, directors of Christian education - - what have you..... but for any one of us to think that our work, in the name of Christ, is less sacred, less worthy, or even inferior, is to render a false judgment.

Through the years the church sometimes has permitted people to think that her contribution to society exists only as people gather together in one place on one day and for the purpose of worship. I have told you repeatedly, if not in actual words, then certainly in the basic philosophy which possesses my soul, that if I wanted a photograph of Saint Luke Church, I'm not so sure that I'd bring a photographer here this morning and get you now, all sanctified-looking like...but rather the true photograph of Saint Luke Church could be taken, one individual at a time, tomorrow, or Tuesday or Wednesday, when you go back to your day's work.....for this is the Christian witness, in any man's work, wherever he may be, if it's done in God's name. Too long the Kingdom has been delayed by virtue of the fact that we've kept the church as something that happens only when you and I get together and sing hymns or offer prayers. You ought to feel yourself at home with God whether you're in church on a Sunday morning or whether you're sitting at your desk with your ledger in front of you, or reaching for this tool at your bench.

In Chicago, they tell me, there is the world's tallest church. It has a spire that soars heavenward. Someone got the grand notion that they ought to put bells up in the tower. So they did. But alas, when they played the bells on the very first day, they had great disappointment. The bells were so far removed from the teeming multitudes on the streets below that the music of the bells could scarce be heard. This could be a kind of indictment against the Christian church: that we

have a way of removing ourselves because we gather in certain places, separated from the world, and we have too little actual encounter with every-day living. That's why, to the glory of God, He looks upon every man as a priest, that every-one who claims the name of Christ, wherever he may go, may share the spirit of Jesus Christ.

The words of the text, to which I refer only at the beginning, the middle and the end of this sermon, "You cannot serve God and mammon", were spoken by Jesus Christ to almost 5,000 people, and what He is declaring in a very clear and certain manner is this....

"If you come after me you have to serve me....I have to come first....."

....and He spoke those words to 99 ⁴⁴/100 % people who never became preachers, ordained clergy, if you please. When He said you must serve God, He was speaking to shepherds, carpenters, tax collectors, fishermen, housewives, innkeepers.....and when He said you must serve God, what do you suppose they did? Did they all line up to become candidates for ordination? Did they all enroll in a theological seminary? No. 99 ⁴⁴/100 % of them went back, the next day, to herding sheep, to making yoke for oxen, to counting the money at the bench.

So you say to yourself.....

....well, Pastor, I can understand how you can look upon your day's work as something given to God. You call upon the sick---that's God's service. You study your Bible. You prepare your sermons. That's God's service. ...you counsel the weary...you try to lead back in the proper way those who are tempted to strgy.....this

is what you're doing from the time that you get up in the morning until the time you go to bed at night, Pastor. I can understand how you can call your day's work something that's labor for God.....

....but how about all the rest of us?--who never

preach sermons, who never teach a Sunday school class, who never go to a theological seminary...

...but rather, we go back to the assembly line, and day after day, do the same thing in the same routine fashion--for the end product that we seldom see.

....do you mean to tell me, Pastor, that this is God's work?

J. H. Compton, one of our scientists, has told us that of perhaps the million people who were involved in the first atomic bomb, less than 1% of them, for obvious reasons, had any idea of what they were doing or why. When a man has to go to a day's work like that, can he honestly believe that he's doing something for God? When Jesus Christ said to those 99 ⁴⁴/100% people, "You have to serve God"they scattered themselves and went back to the routine monotonous daily chores.

The Christian church says that you have a right to believe that what you offer to God is something being done for Him. How can a man believe this who is a carpenter, an electrician...a scientist, one who works in a laboratory...one who works in an assembly line? Well, let us look at it this way: if every man is to consider himself a Christian workman, he may begin at this point....that the only thing that he can really give life, which he can call his own, is a day's work!... your labor, your toil....your talent---ah! God gave you that!your resources--- somebody else put them in front of you....

....and the only thing that a man really can give that's his own is the sweat of his brow, the labor of his hands or his

mind. Let us begin at that point.

And the second thing that a man should remember if he's going to consider himself a workman for Christ, even though it may be at the assembly line or dealing with figures in a ledger: almost every job that claims a man's time involves people in one way or another. Even the man who works by himself is still doing something where people are involved. The man who works at the assembly line---what chance has he to visit with people?....ah, but there's always the lunch hour.....there's always the commuter train.....there's always the car-pool. And as far as the foreman, the supervisor, is concerned, there's always the man under him or above him who has all kinds of trouble. When a man goes to his day's work....

people.....people.....people.....people.....

....and what can you do for Jesus Christ except see them as people?....burdens.....responsibilities

....and sometimes just one kind moment of understanding on your part can balance the scales or tip it one way or the other.

And the third thing that any man who takes the name of Christ can consider as he goes to his day's work: that in the sight of God it's always a tragedy to waste a day---a day that is unproductive---a day that serves no useful end. To do a day's work honestly and well---to make every moment count. I keep reminding myself of the fellow who went into industry in the name of Jesus Christ and tried to make converts.....one day during the noon hour he experienced the great joy of a man in the factory accepting for the first time Jesus Christ.....and just as they were about to quit for that day, the workman, turning his back upon the machine, said to the man who introduced him to Jesus Christ - - "Now what do I do next?".... implying, of course, now that I've become a Christian, do you want me to lead prayer

meeting next Wednesday night?....do you want me to teach a Sunday school class?....
do you want me to become a church councilman?

....and the man who introduced him to Jesus Christ simply said,

"What do you do next? Why, man, you make sure that you
give your boss a good day's work!"

...for this, too, belongs to the Kingdom.

I am reasonable certain that when we come to our last day,

Jesus Christ will search our hearts.

I am also quite sure that He'll take a good long look at
our hands, symbol of our lives, that were meant to
be productive

.....and perhaps we will be found wanting
in the balance because of the days that
we wasted when work might have been done.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"The Christian Workman"

Optional introduction

The day's work for many people can be any one of a number of things - interesting, challenging, delightful - or boring, burdensome, monotonous, tedious, meaningless. Sadly, however, far too many use the latter list of descriptives as one trying day follows another: "Friday, Thank God" may be for innumerable workers their favorite cry.

And this is justification, you see, for this sermon on the Sunday nearest Labor Day, as an attempt is made to look upon the days' work by the Christian as something of divine service. Unless the Christian can honestly believe the words of the hymn -

"Teach me, my God and King,
In all things thee to see
And what I do in anything,
To do it as for Thee.

If done to obey thy laws,
E'en servile labors shine;
Hallowed is toil if this the cause,
The meanest work, divine."

unless this is what a workman lives by - - his daily labor will most certainly be monotonous - - and worst of all - - meaningless.

Appendix

For those of us who bear the name of Christ work is to be considered holy - - . Who then among you can say as Kagawa, the Japanese saint in his "Songs From The Slums" confessed - -

"I cannot invent new things
Like the airships which sail
On silver wings;
But today
A wonderful thought in the dawn was given
And the stripes on my robe
Shining from wear
Were suddenly fair
Bright with the light
Falling from Heaven -

Gold, and silver, and bronze
Lights from the windows of Heaven.
And the thought was this:
That a secret plan
Is hid in my hand;
That my hand is big,
Big
Because of this plan;
That God dwells in my hand
Knows this secret plan
Of the things He will do for the world - - using my hand!"

September 9, 1962

"THE TWO SIDES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE"

This morning's sermon, the first in the series based upon Colossians, carries the title, "The Two Sides of the Christian Life," and the text is from the 1st chapter of that letter to the Colossians and it's the 4th verse:

"Because we have heard of your faith
in Christ Jesus and of the love which
you have for all the saints."

A college dean whom we admired greatly, in company with a number of other educators, had the faculty of repeating himself. Again and ever so often from his store-house of memory created by an accumulation of experiences and impressions he would recall for us his account of two holy men whom he had seen in his travels in the Middle East.....

- - the one man, as he would tell us again and again, stood only on one leg, hour after hour, given to godly contemplation. He never saw anyone....he never spoke a word to anyone... he just wouldn't allow himself to be distracted as he stood on one leg, thinking, of all things, about God.

- - then there was the other chap, who kept himself in solitary confinement. In a cell of his own choosing he had gone,.... and there removed and separated from the world, his only contact being the contact with a friend of long years who brought him day after day a handful of figs by which to sustain his body and his soul.

....now the good dean would recall these two men for us because he took unusual satisfaction in indicting a kind of religion that concentrated so much on heaven that it had no earthly value. The good dean had little appreciation for the

mystical element in religion. For him religion had to be intensely practical. It had to be -- yes -- a hand on God....but also a hand on a fellow man, and both had to happen at the same time; and the one ought never to be occurring at the expense of the other.

Some of us perhaps can't go quite as far as the dean--to so indict these two holy men from the Middle East as to say that they had no value whatsoever. God himself can use many different things. God himself can allow a variety of witness. And who knows, perchance there were people who were impressed by the fact that here were two men who while they were separated from the world did this: hour after hour, day after day and week after week....contemplated upon the fact of God. They also served--even though they may not serve you and me.

The Apostle Paul, I think, would have agreed only to a point with the old college dean. I think the Apostle Paul would have said....

"Why, Dean, I too am exasperated with that kind of religion.

And that's why once upon a time when I wrote a letter to some Christians in a town called Colossae, I didn't go very far in my first chapter in that letter until I said that I thanked God for the kind of Christian witness that some of them had, because when I evaluated it, they were Christians who were two-sided.....and they were to be commended for their faith in Christ Jesus.....and their love of their fellow men."

Now with the Apostle Paul and with the good dean I am constrained to say that whatever purpose a man standing on one leg as he thinks about God might have, one also must say that a man standing on one leg doesn't get very far, and that a man separated from the world in a solitary cell, even though he is thinking about

"The Two Sides of the Christian Life"

God, can't be of much help to the struggler of life who falls amid the thick of battle. This sermon is designed to call to your attention and mind that there must be two sides to the Christian faith:

...the one must be the clear and proper understanding
of the nature of Christ

...and the other must be bringing into clear and proper
focus the need of my brother, no matter how near nor
far away he may be.

A sad thing to be said about our religion today is that there are people who when they think about God think in terms of vague generality. Yes, there is Someone up there - - and we've even become so familiar with Him that we call Him the Man Upstairs; or if we wouldn't go that far, we sing such sentimental songs as "He", which upon close examination has no substance whatsoever.

God is more than a pronoun!

God is more than a gentleman, someone upstairs.

The Christian church suffers today from the fact that all too many of her people have a fuzzy notion as to what God is. And Jesus Christ would have come in vain if you and I have not been able to read upon the lines of God's face, the lines of love and patience, at the same time, strong ethical demand made upon any man who encounters God.

The sad thing that has to be said about much of religion today is that it's a religion that has never clearly understood the mind, the proper and the basic character of God. Now this is what we mean by faith - - faith that apprehends the nature of God - - faith that allows God to apprehend you and me so we understand each other - - so that we're constantly aware of the fact that God is.... and we know what this God is like who exists.

We can learn from our Greek Orthodox brethren--yes we can, when they, perhaps more than any other brand of Christians, are given to mysticism, and are constantly contemplating the nature and the character of God. A Greek Orthodox knows the nature and character of God. He knows what God is like.

While we are indicting ourselves, we are also a people, perhaps more than any other generation of mankind, bent on doing good---trying to help people.....
...and in the minds of all too many folk even this is fuzzy(?) and we help people, we know not why nor how, nor ever in the wisest possible way.

The two sides of the Christian religion, according to the Apostle Paul, must always be recognized.....

...first of all, as a matter of faith, to be able to
apprehend and to understand the basic nature and
the character of God

...and on the other hand, to be made aware of my
brother who is in need

....so that one must balance not only
the Greek Orthodox concept of religion which touches upon mysticism.....one must
also allow due and proper accord to my Quaker friend who loses himself in ministering to the needs of other people.

There is a kind of religion that thinks so much about God that he
never sees his fellow man.

There is also a kind of social welfare that thinks so much of man
that he never sees God.

The two are in error.

...and God be thanked for the Quaker witness which
goes its way modified by the thought: "I must look for that which is God in every man." Man's faith must never be anything by which he sees only God and

not man; nor to the contrary, the kind of social welfare by which he sees man and never God.

I am constantly haunted by the prayer of the Russian Orthodox who devoutly knelt before the icon and prayed:

"God, reveal Thy face to me - -

God, reveal Thy face to me - - "

....and you remember it, all the time he kept praying, the only thing he saw was the parade of the bewildered humanity....the halt, the lame, the sinful..... this is what he saw.

The two sides of the Christian religion:

...to be able to understand the nature and
character of God

...and always to be identified with the basic need of
one's fellowmen.

Why did the Apostle Paul talk this way so strongly? Why did he allow only four sentences to pass until he struck this note in his letter to the Colossians? I'll tell you why. Trusted friends had brought him a report of how the Christian religion was getting along in this town of Colossae. And they said- - -

"Paul, we have trouble on our hands.

We have an inferior brand of religion in Colossae,
and unless it's corrected, the Christian cause could
perish in that town."

....and as Paul evaluated the Christian religion in Colossae he discovered that there were many people in that town who when they talked about religion, the only thing they talked about was...."Well, what is God like? and what is Jesus Christ like? and where are we going to put Him?" Whatever they did in the name of reli-

gion was talk.

....then as Paul tried to understand the Christians in Colossae he discovered another group of people there who whenever they got together, all they did was to talk about what they could eat and what they could drink and what they could wear!....as though virtue in the Christian religion would be conceded to them by certain habits of food and drink and clothing.

Impatiently, Paul is disturbed that men and women should concern themselves with this kind of religion in the name of Jesus Christ. And so that's why in the very beginning he says....

"If you want to talk about the Christian religion,

always be sure to talk about the two sides.

...one is the nature of Christ

...and the other is the practice of the

Christian religion - - serving love.

You can't have one without the other."

Do you remember the story that our Lord told....about a man who traveled from one town to another and was victimized; and as he traveled, there were two men who came along that road--two men who knew a great deal about religion....

- - name any chapter in the Bible--they'd have something to say about it

- - name the commandments, backward and forward--they could do it

- - and they always showed up faithfully for all the religious observances and feasts....they were religious men

...when they came to this man who was victimized they passed by....as Jesus Christ indicted them, they passed by, you remember, on the other side. It wasn't that they didn't know something about God.....it was simply that they were unable to relate what they knew about God to another man's need. They had faith! - - they

"The Two Sides of the Christian Life"

believed.....in a God.....

...and I'm willing to admit that they believed that somehow God in His own way would right all the ills of the world. There are people who subscribe to that kind of thinking - - ultimately, God, at the end, will have everything straightened out all right....just give God a little more time. This, I too believe. But I also believe that when I subscribe to that kind of thinking God doesn't say, "You can put blinders on your eyes to the immediate moment....and I give you the privilege now of forgetting about your share of responsibility in righting and correcting all the ills of the world - - "

...this is the risk you and I run--ah, yes we do! -- with the problems of the minorities in our day....with all the problems of social and national injustice...

"It just takes time, you see. Give us another generation and a generation after that....this thing will be corrected"

....and all the while we allow ourselves to become impervious, indifferent, insensitive to the fact that this God who will ultimately correct is dependent on His time table with what I do right now, in the present moment, with the situation that may confront me. It isn't that it's going to be solved overnight. It's simply if in God's good time it's going to be solved, I, too, have some measure of responsibility. That's why the Apostle Paul says, "When I commend those of you in Colossae, I am happy to see that there are those of you who have faith in God and at the same time practice your love toward your fellowman. There are two sides to the Christian religion.....

faith and ethics.....

creed and conduct

belief and behavior....

and you can't have one without the other."

There's one closing paragraph in this sermon. Martin Luther said the heart of all true religion lies in the use of personal pronouns. If Martin Luther were preaching upon this text, he'd say,

"Tonight when you go home and read your Bible take a pencil and underline the pronoun "your"....

'because we have heard of your faith and
because we have heard of the love which
you have'

..."

You can't have faith for somebody else. You and I may have faith in someone else. We can't have faith for someone else. By the same token, you and I cannot take the place of anyone else in discharging his obligation to love. And in the plan of God, when you are given the opportunity to allow your faith to issue in love towards somebody else and you are there, no one else, not even God himself, can take your place. You just can't love by proxy. It applies to religion as well as to literature...."You speak for yourself, John." The only faith a man really has is the faith he can call his own. The only love that a man really has is the love that he shares.

They had trouble in the Christian church at Colossae....

and the only way to correct it, says the Apostle Paul,

...is to find more people who know what they believe,

as far as the nature of Jesus Christ is concerned

...and then to allow that faith to issue, energized by love

and the Christian witness.

Maybe you and I, in the months that lie ahead, might be able to do a little better job.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WHAT THE GOSPEL IS AND DOES"

Today's sermon bears the title, "What The Gospel Is And Does." It's from the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians, portions of the 5th through the 8th verses:

"-of this you have heard before in the word
of truth, the gospel which has come to you
- - in fact to all the world."

A man has his choice to do one of two things when he gets a report that things are not exactly as they ought to be. He may either offer a scathing condemnation to the people involved, or he may search long to discover if there's anything praiseworthy that can be said, so that a man could encourage those who, caught up in the mess, are still trying to do what is right and proper. A man has one of two choices.

This must have been the situation in which the Apostle Paul found himself when one of the men from the Christian community in that Asia Minor town of Colossae came to him and said that they had an inferior brand of Christianity on their hands in Colossae - - that for the most part the people there were not really proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul begins in a masterful way, by writing them a letter, and as he writes that letter, he commends those who are in that community who are remaining true to the Gospel.

Now there is always hope for the Christian church when there can be found those who are true to the Gospel. Paul was told that in Colossae there were people who having heard the Gospel continued steadfastly in it. In it they were rooted and grounded; and their deeds reflected the teachings that had been brought to them.

There are those who maintain that in the Christian church today there is an inferior brand of the Christian religion; that while it may be established,

thanks to Henry Link's title of a generation ago, "The Return To Religion" - - that while it can be established that 62% of our population have some relationship with the church or the synagogue, that it does not follow that they know what it is to believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ....

....that there are people who are joining churches but
never committing themselves to Jesus Christ

....that there are people who are hearing sermons but
they are moral essays, dealing primarily with
political ills or social problems, the problems
that a man must confront day by day...but never
as over against the light of the Christian Gospel

....this is an indictment that's made against contemporary Christianity - - that while there are many people who may be turning to the churches, it doesn't follow that they are turning to Jesus Christ.

Let me share with you snatches of conversation that perhaps you've heard in circles in which you have moved. This one is an example:

"Pastor, preachers today are preaching more eloquently;
they are more learned and more scholarly. But why don't
they preach the Gospel? What the church needs today
more than anything else is Gospel preaching."

....and you've heard it put this way, as I have heard it, focusing attention now on our own congregation:

"Pastor, you have quite a youth program down there at
Saint Luke Church. Why, you even have one staff member
who does nothing but concentrate on 400 of your
people who fall somewhere between the ages of those
who are in the grades 6 through 12. You have a num-

ber of different programs....

...Boy Scouts...canteen,...athletics....Luther

League....Sunday School....Big Thursday....

..the Monday afternoon program....the choirs...

...you keep them very busy. But tell me, Pastor,

are they getting the Gospel? Do they know as much

about the Gospel as a Communist youth knows about the

cardinal principles of Karl Marx?"

....I sat with a group of ministers last Monday morning. One of the ministers shared with the group what he did on a part of his vacation. He visited, in our community, that is in metropolitan Washington, a Christian church, magnificently new, funds to erect it came from all parts of the world. He was much impressed, he said, as he went inside the church. And he studied the symbolism and the ascriptions....and many of the ascriptions and the symbols dealt with Mary, the mother of our Lord....

...The Lady of Perpetual Help

...The Queen of Heaven - - sometimes referred to as

Co-Redemptrix with Christ, meaning having

equal authority in the redemption of men

from their sins!

.....and my fellow pastor says to me - - "Is this the Gospel?"

....and I have said to myself, when I've gone away from this pulpit on a Sunday morning, after having preached to you for 15, 18, 20 minutes, as I hear the searching of my soul by the Head of the Church:

...."and was that the Gospel which you preached?"

It's a question, you see, that has to be raised, for the true treasure of the church, said Martin Luther, is the Gospel....and if the Christian church

does not deal with its true treasure, who will? It's the only thing, honestly - - it's the only thing that we have to offer the world: the Gospel of Jesus Christ.and it's the question that has to be asked the Quaker, the Roman Catholic, the Greek Orthodox, the Protestant....

....it's a question that has to be asked of the preacher

...it has to be asked of the Sunday School teacher

....it has to be asked of the youth worker

....it has to be asked of the parent

....is it the Gospel which we are sharing,

which is the true treasure of the church?

Paul felt that as long as he could believe that there were people in that Asia Minor town who were still being true to the Gospel, that there was hope for the church.

Martin Marty, named, by the way, by LIFE magazine as one of the 100 new leaders of this generation, a distinguished church theologian who, incidentally, in his student days, was an assistant down here at Christ Lutheran Church not too far away on 16th Street....he wrote not too long ago a book with the strange title, "The New Shape of the American Religion", in which he takes contemporary Christianity in America to task for talking too much about fuzzy notions of God and not really preaching the Gospel. Now, what is the Gospel?

In our Big Thursday program, under the direction of our Parish Deaconess there is a course being offered to some of our boys and girls on the "Key Words of the Christian Faith," and I most certainly hope that one of those words to be studied will be the word "gospel". Now what does the word 'gospel' mean?

Thanks to our Anglo-Saxon derivation, it means "God-Spell" - - which is essentially "God's Story." The Gospel is the story of God! The Gospel is the message of God - - the message of what God is, His nature, what He has done and

what He is doing.

You see, this is where a lot of preaching today falls short. It deals all too much with what men say to God, and what men are doing for God. But the Gospel essentially isn't what men do for God, nor is it what men think about God....

...the Gospel essentially is the story of God which deals with what God thinks of you....and how God wants to use you

...not how you and I want to use God.

One of the best known preachers of our generation was, in my book, preaching less than the Gospel because again and over so often he kept striking the note: "You turn to God because of what He can do for you" - - and this is not always the Gospel.

...God isn't to be used. We are to be used by God.

..and the Gospel isn't basically what we think about

Him - - it's what He thinks about us

Let me give you in one sentence what I think we have a right to believe the Gospel really is:

The Gospel is the true story of God's love

...the true story.....the story of God's love.

This is the unique thing about the Christian Gospel: it takes the veil away from the face of God. It reveals Him. And when you see God as He is - truly now - He is a God of love. There are many people in the world who think about God, who know that He exists, but they have yet to see Him as a God of love, holy, righteous love, the true kind of love. I'm not being facetious when I say it - - that for all too many people God is the kind of doting grandfather, who in order

to keep the good will of his own flesh and blood will dole out favors because he wants their respect and their kindness and their affection.....this is not the true story of God. The true story of God as revealed through the Scriptures and as made plain in the face of Jesus Christ is a holy, loving Father, who no matter what His children may do, goes on loving them just the same. He may not like what they do, but He can never have done loving them. This is the Gospel, the true picture of the basic nature and character of God! - - essentially love!

Now what does the Gospel do?

The Gospel is the power unto salvation, says the Apostle Paul....

It is the nature of this love of God to change men's lives.

And it was a noted historian who said that the secret for the early Christian church was this: it proclaimed the true message of God's love; and in the second place - -

men and women lived changed lives

....once the power of this love became effective and operative through them. It is the power of God's love that changes men. You can't be exposed to love - - any kind of love, without being affected. If that is true on a human level, how much more so is it true on the divine level. The Gospel is the proclamation of the message of God....

...God made you

...God loves you

...God cares for you

...God will save you from Hell

...the true story of the Gospel of God's love is that a man doesn't have to go to Hell, because of the heart of God that's big enough to claim him; and when men and women know this, when men and women are told this....there is the power by which their lives become changed!

What else does the Gospel do?

The Gospel spreads itself throughout the whole world. It makes itself available to any man.

Now there are some things that some people can never have, because they don't have enough prestige, they don't have enough influence, they don't have enough money, they don't have enough status, they don't have enough learning....there are some things some people can never have because of these reasons. But just as true as life is available to anyone, even so the Gospel itself is made available to any man. If you and I had a way of figuring it out right now, what a complex picture we really are right now - - the variety of moods and temperaments which is all of us! the variety of our backgrounds and experiences! and the different status that one may occupy as over against the other in life....

....and yet the Gospel has come to each of us. And when the Gospel comes into a man's life, it becomes productive....it bears fruit....it can change a man, it can change a woman.

Now before this sermon is concluded, the question has to be asked:

well, how is this Gospel transmitted?

how does it get around?

how do people know about the love of God?

Well, strange as it may seem, God depends upon us to tell the story. The Gospel is humanly transmitted. It's the story of God's love passed on to other people through people. God has seen fit to allow it to happen that way.

Honestly now, those of you who have been claimed by the Gospel of God - - really now, you can't think of Jesus Christ without thinking of a person, can you? someone who became God's agent to pass on to you the wonderful story of God's love?

....I once heard a missionary who came back from Liberia. He told something

that I had never heard before, something that I can't quite forget. He said that they had discovered in Liberia an old native chief who said that he had found the cure for leprosy. No one else had ever said that before - there is no such thing as a known cure for leprosy. This old chief said he had a cure.and they begged him, they cajoled, they did everything under the sun to get from him the secret....but he refused to tell. This is a parable.

Listen carefully.....

....Christians are the only people on the face of the earth who really know the whole story, the true story of God's love

...and if they don't pass it on

...if they keep it just to themselves

...if we become content just to go through this world to tell each other

....what hope is there?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE PRAYER OF A SAINT"

Slowly and deliberately between now and next June we'll be finding our way through Paul's letter to the Christians at Colossae. This morning's sermon is another in that series and it bears the title, "The Prayer of a Saint." These words from that first chapter of Colossians constitute the background for this sermon:

"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness."

The urge to pray comes naturally, and especially to saints.

Let us take the first observation immediately. The urge to pray comes naturally. You don't have to argue with a man as to whether or not he will pray. It isn't a case of will he? or won't he? Man, made in the image of God, will turn toward God, just as the plant turns toward the sun and no power in this world can keep the plant from turning toward the force of the sun. Even so, man, made to respond to God, will at one time or another cry out, if not to Him who is his Heavenly Father, then to Someone. The urge to pray comes naturally.

And the problem is not - will a man pray? or won't he? - even as our Lord Jesus Christ when He was asked to give instruction to that blessed company of the disciples began by saying: "When ye pray, say - - "it's so very obvious, you see, even in the mind of God through Jesus Christ; for He did not say, "If per-

chance you should pray," rather He says, "When ye pray,".....for the urge to pray comes naturally.

And now, especially to saints.

You make a mistake, my friend, if you ever permit yourself to believe that a man can ever arrive at the point where he doesn't have to pray any longer. In fact, those who are nearest to perfection are the ones who pray most. There are a number of different reasons why this is true....

...the closer a man comes to God, the greater the prize he is in the eye of the Devil. The more saintly you become, my friend, the more the Devil would give his right hand to have you. You are the supreme catch--you're the great prize.....to be able to snatch away from the very shadow of the gate of Paradise someone so near to God is the aim and the delight of the Devil....

You make a mistake, then, if you ever permit yourself to believe that saints don't pray; saints are the ones who pray most....

....because they have, if you may put it this way, more at stake than anyone else! They have so much more to lose! And they recognize so easily that it is not of their own strength that they enjoy such bliss and such communion with God; it is simply their response to the Heavenly Spirit itself....

Saints pray. The urge to pray comes to every man....most particularly so to saints.

It has to be said at once that when we use this word 'saint' we do not use it in the limited sense in which the Roman Catholic Church uses it. You know, of course you do, that in the Roman Catholic Church only certain people ever merit the name 'saint'. It's the official pronouncement of the church that declares this person more blessed than somebody else, and they get all their reasons, you see, to justify their choices. We rely upon the New Testament itself, and the New

Testament usage of that word 'saint'....

....the word saint is characteristic of anyone who believes
in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who orders his daily life
to conform to Christ's will and Christ's peace
...whose daily life is the reflection of the compassion
and the mercy of Jesus Christ
...whose daily life is one consistent surrender to
the will of God

....it's in this sense that we use the word 'saint' - - as the New Testament
uses it.....and where, you see, perchance there is opportunity for you to
come into the picture.

The Apostle Paul stands out now as Exhibit A. He is the saint of whom
we speak. And it's his prayer with which we concern ourselves right now.

We can learn much from the prayer habits of the saints. Take this prayer,
which he immediately offered to God in behalf of the Christians in the Asia
Minor town of Colossae. He began by saying - -

"From the time that we first heard it we began
to pray for you and we haven't stopped praying
for you."

- - the most wonderful thing that you can ever do for any person is to pray
for him. And sometimes the only thing that you can ever do for a person is
to pray for him.

Now they brought word to the Apostle Paul about the trouble they were
having down in Colossae. Christians are human beings. They constantly run
the risk of being imperiled by this problem or that problem. This is character-
istic of a human being and Christians are human beings. There's always the
problem. And when they brought the Apostle Paul the word that things were not

going as they ought to go down there in Colossae, they had a situation on their hand, the first thing that the Apostle Paul thought of doing was to pray for them.

Now notice the word "from the time we first heard it, we have not ceased to pray for you." When saints pray, they don't first pray for problems; when saints pray they don't first concern themselves with issues....when saints pray they first concern themselves with people. For basically, you see, this is the important thing. We ought never to say to God - - "Take the problem away" - - because there's always going to be one problem, if not this one, then another kind of a problem.

It's the very nature of life itself. Even our Lord Jesus Christ, when He was recruiting followers, servants for the Kingdom, He went out and said, "If any man comes after me, let it be known right now - - there's always this problem of a cross!" - - before He even mentioned the promise of a reward....before He even talked about crowns He talked about crosses. This is part of the inevitable fact of life!

When this saint of an Apostle Paul was told about the problems and the situation that existed down there among the Colossians, he didn't first say, "Dear God, this is awful! What a terrible mess they have down there - - God, in your own way, wipe the slate clean right away - - won't you, God? There's a lot at stake down there and we've got to get rid of this problem."

....No. The Apostle Paul says: "Since we first heard of it - -
....the problem, the issue, the heresy, if you please--the threatening peril to the Christian faith....."Since we first heard about it we began to pray
for you."

...and this is always the direct approach to solving a problem, because people are involved; and the only way a problem is going to be solved is through people. We have a habit of praying for issues and situations....

....we pray for peace - - but it doesn't naturally follow that

a nation free from the problems of war will automatically serve
God in quietness and strength!

....we pray that men who are hungry shall be given bread - -

but it doesn't naturally follow that a man with a full
stomach will have all the problems of the world solved
...it's never as simple as that!

...we pray that governments shall be free from graft and corruption - -

but it's never going to be free from graft and corruption
simply by praying that graft and corruption be removed
from the scene!

You pray for the people involved!

You want peace on earth? Then remember the words of Thomas a Kempis
who says, "All men want peace, but all men do not want
the things that make for peace."

...so therefore we begin to pray for men who will have
peace in their hearts! and give themselves to
working for the cause of peace.

...the proper declaration that came from Heaven concerning
the birth of Jesus Christ - - "Peace on earth among
men of good will" - - that's the proper translation...

....peace comes on earth among men; and so we pray for
men that they may desire peace; we pray for men that they
may work for peace

I frankly admit to you that every time I hear of any degree of graft or corrup-
tion, every time I hear of something that isn't exactly as it ought to be, I
take my own soul to task....when I, living in the shadow of the Nation's Capital,
have the good fortune to know certain people who are near the scene, who run the

"The Prayer of a Saint" (6)

risk of being involved ...I, the Pastor of this congregation, with so high a percentage of you involved in the work of our government...I take myself to task when I remember how many days pass when I have not taken your name in prayer and prayed for you against the problem that so easily besets and disturbs. Says the Apostle Paul: "When we first heard about it, we began to pray for you." The fact that problems arise is part of life itself, and our first concern then must be with the people.

Well then what happens when a saint begins to pray for people?

It's an eloquent prayer. The burden of the prayer is this:

" - - God, give them strength.

God, help them to play the part of the man.

God, help them to endure - patiently - to

stick it out, to face up to the problem - "

The true prayer of the saint is never that the problem should be taken away. The true prayer of the saint is that those of us who have to face the problem shall have the strength and the courage and the wisdom which is God's by which the problem shall be faced and conquered.

I'm impressed by the fact that when saints pray, quite often they pray for one another - - "from the time that we first heard of it we began to pray for you - - "

....in this meaningful 20 minutes that we spend each Sunday morning in the Chapel of the Grateful Heart before the first regular service of the day, a handful of us - eight this morning - we offer to God this day in Saint Luke Church. What do we pray for? It was the Parish Deaconess who directed our petitions this morning. She prayed that the Spirit of God would be made known to all of us who worship here today...

....and then she supported that prayer by naming the man at

the console

...she supported that prayer by naming those who sing in the
choirs, that they might sing from right and proper motives,
that they might sing gladly unto the Lord

...she supported that prayer by praying for the ushers, that
they with Christian courtesy might greet you

...she supported that prayer by praying for the pastors, that
when they preach and when they conduct the service of the
church they might do it with true sensitivity of spirit

...she supported that prayer by praying for the Director of
Christian Education and every Sunday School teacher and
officer

....that God's way, God's Spirit and God's truth should be experienced in
Saint Luke Church this day.....and then she prayed for the people involved.

When saints pray, they pray for people, because God's preferred way of
solving any problem - - God's preferred way of meeting any issue - - is always
through a person. Part of the glory of the fact of redemption is that when
God Himself concerned Himself with the problem of sin He worked through the
person of Jesus Christ. As your Pastor, I beg you to keep a prayer list handy,
to pray for certain people.

One of the most Christlike men of this generation that I've ever met I
met more than a decade ago in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He walked down the
aisle of a church, and I felt the very presence of the angels of Heaven. This
is what it is to be in the presence of Ljas Ordass, the Bishop at one time
of our church in Hungary....

....the Communists have done their work on him.

He is a broken man in body and even the mind now has - well, it's taken its
toll. The hands that he used to fold in prayer are quite busy now, crocheting

and knitting.....

...I'm ashamed of myself when a single day goes by when I never ask God to give a special favor of peace and quietness of mind to that man.

Why we ever allow ourselves to think that saints get to the place where they can go it on their own I don't know. So as your Pastor I implore you - - get more people on your prayer list....

....name them.....

....and don't ever take a name off.

Said the Apostle Paul - -

" - - from the time that we first heard it,
we began to pray for you, and we never
stopped."

* * *

"GOD, THE SECRET KEEPER"

Since on this day we recognize our responsibilities to the cause of Christian Education, the sermon has been prepared with that fact in mind. The text is the last verse in the 29th chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy:

"The secret things belong unto the Lord our God;
but things which are revealed belong unto us
and to our children forever - - "

God is the great secret-keeper. So it would appear to man who is constantly curious. For there is so much that I want to know, and when I confront God with my questions all too often He remains silent.

I ask Him such questions as these:

- - how long will I live, God?
- - where will I be and what will be my state ten years from now?
- - will those whom I love who are now seriously ill - - will they become well?
- - God, why do I sin as much as I do?
- - God, why can't I love you more than I do?
- - God, how long are you going to let Khrushchev go on?
- - God, why did that plane go down in the North Atlantic?
- - God, what happens to me the minute I die?

....these are my questions. They're yours, too, aren't they?

And ever so often when you confront God with them, He may keep the answers to these questions all to Himself. God is the great secret-keeper.

And yet all learning is based on curiosity. Many grand and wonderful discoveries that man has made he has made simply because he has been the inquiring one. He's gone knocking at doors, he's gone peering into windows, wondering what

is on the other side, what lies ahead. And didn't God implant this instinct of curiosity within me? And don't I know enough about God and the way He deals with me, that sometimes He knows a special measure of delight in answering my questions? Why, then, will He keep some secrets from me?

I think I know the reason why. Maybe more than one reason.

Perchance this could be it: many of the things that I ask Him are speculative in nature. They deal with things yet to come. They deal with the future - - and this is always in the realm of speculation....and I may be given to undue worry and anxiety about things that haven't occurred yet...

...and God, all the time that I show Him my anxiety for things yet to come, remains silent, for the simple reason - - could it be? - - that if He told us everything, such answers could be a kind of distracting influence upon the demands of the present moment, what is in front of me now.

God says - - "Give to this thing your undivided attention

....take no thought for the morrow, for the
morrow will take care of itself - - you have
enough on your hands right now - -"

...and this because He loves us. And sometimes He knows how awesome, how frightening the future could be if He revealed it for us. So to keep us from a distraction that we might not be able to better do the things of the present moment, He says, "Now as far as tomorrow is concerned, we won't talk about it right now."

- - "Tell me, God - - "and He remains silent. And this is
the reason.

There is another reason, too, I think.

There are some things we're in no position to be able to understand or to apprehend. It's only as we mature that we can handle certain things. It's only

as we become a bit old that God allows us to see what we might not have seen earlier. And this, too, out of His wisdom and out of His love, He withholds from us certain things that we might want to know. I tell you this on good authority: when His Son, our Lord, was here on earth, to the disciple band so precious in His sight He said:

"I have yet much more to tell you - - "

...as much as to say

"I'd give anything if I could only tell it to you right now, but I can't! And the reason is, you cannot bear it right now. You're incapable of understanding."

....so God remains the great secret keeper, out of His love for me.

But what should concern me most isn't what God doesn't tell me. I should rejoice in the fact that God has seen fit to reveal Himself. There are many things that God has already told me. There are many things that I need to know that God Himself has taken the initiative and offered them to me. That's why this writer in this book of the Old Testament, centuries before Jesus Christ, with prophetic insight could say:

"The secret things belong to the Lord; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children."

The glory of God lies not that He wants to remain hidden and veiled... but the glory of God lies in the fact that He has already revealed Himself - -

...He has already given us something to think about

..He has already given us something to hold us in good stead.

On this Sunday on which we recognize the cause of Christian Education, I would challenge those who serve in the ministry of teaching in this parish to

accept at face value the implicit truth of this text. God has already revealed Himself. The secret which is basically God has already been told.

God said, "This revelation belongs to you, and what is more,
belongs to your children."

...the tragedy in life is when a man fails to claim for himself the good that rightfully belongs to him.

- - may I say that again?

....the tragedy in life lies in the fact that man
can fail to claim for himself the good that rightfully belongs to him.

But there is even a greater tragedy than that....

- - when those of us who are old fail to offer children
what has been properly intended for them.

The text says what God has already revealed belongs to us and to our children forever. Those of us who work with parents and with children and young people have our hearts torn asunder when again and ever so often we discover that there is being withheld from people and persons what rightfully belongs to them. God is the extravagant one. God has given to each of us an overflowing cup. God has given to each of us more than enough by which to share with somebody else.....

....then it's the husband or the wife who goes starving

- - just for a little bit of love that's being withheld

....it's the teenager whose life is being frustrated

- - just because there is being withheld from him just a

little more patience, just a little more kindness,

just a little more respect...for his difficult

adolescent years in which a person is trying to emerge

...no longer a child...not yet an adult - - but a soul

caught up in this terrible process of maturation.

God, out of His love,

God, out of His patient dealing with us, says,

"As I am patient with you - - "

(and in the sight of God any adult, no matter how mature he is, is still an adolescent as each of us is in the process of becoming - -)

God says,

"Out of the love and the patience and the understanding
that I give to you, do not withhold this from someone
else."

- - the tragedy of life lies ever so often that we withhold what has been intended for people and for persons in their growth and in their development. In the sight of God this belongs to every one of us and any man who claims it for himself from God has no right to keep it from somebody else...

...be it his father, his wife, or his child.

Now for our purpose this morning let us recognize the truth that what we need to know most concerning God He has already given us. He has offered to us the supreme revelation in Jesus Christ. How you and I can ever react to this casually is more than I can know! Ponder the truth of it! - -

in Jesus Christ you and I have the perfect, the complete
revelation of God!

...there is nothing more to be added!

...there is nothing more to be said!

...this is all that God is! this is all that God

can do!

....God has taken the initiative, and this is the underlying fact
and the meaning of the Incarnation - - that God came to earth
in the person of Jesus Christ and said

"Look! Here I am - - this is all you need to know
- - this is everything that you need to know
about God!"

...so much so that one day that Galilean carpenter's son could say:

"Look at me. Whoever has seen me knows exactly
what God is like."

Now in our Sunday School teaching and in our sharing of the truth of God
we must remember that what God wants us most to know isn't basically things
about Him. It isn't enough for a Sunday School teacher to teach her boys and
girls that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem....that His earthly parents were
Mary and Joseph....that He had a certain number of disciples that they can name
....that He preached the Sermon on the Mount....

....what God wants us most to know is not essentially facts
about Him

....what God wants us most to know is His
nature and His character.

It is true that it's a basic principle in theology and religion that it
isn't essentially what a person may know, as it is whom he knows. It is never
enough just to know certain things about God - - what the basic principles of
Christian truth are.....the primary factor is:

Do you know Jesus Christ?

Do you know Him?

This God has revealed.

Jesus says, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father"

...the Christian church says everyone has a right to know this. This is the truth of God which belongs to every man and to our children forever. The tragedy in life lies in the fact that a man may fail to claim for himself what rightfully belongs to him....but an even greater tragedy may be when we withhold from children what was intended for them.

It has been passed on to us as gospel truth that a missionary going to a foreign land told for the first time the story of Jesus Christ. He met with this reaction:

"This Jesus that you tell me about, missionary, when did you say He came to earth?"

The missionary said,

"Oh, about two thousand years ago."

"And all of this that He did occurred then?"

"Yes."

"Why have you been so long in telling us?

- - why have you kept it from us?"

The greater tragedy that can befall any of us is to some day be confronted by Christ and have Christ say:

"I came to you....I died for you....I heard your every prayer.

My heart was broken for you. But not for you alone - -

- - for your children as well!

And now in the last great day I find that your children

don't know as much as they should, and I hold you responsible."

....it could be as tragic as all that...

....but it doesn't have to be.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"IN THE TIME OF THE YELLOW CORN"

The church does well to include in her schedule the Festival of the Harvest; and our thanks to the special committee that has artistically arranged here in the Narthex, in the Nave and in the Chancel the fruits of the earth, reminders of the fact that it is by the Lord's hand that we are sustained - - it is from His bounty that we are fed.

The sermon on this day that marks the Festival of the Harvest bears the title, "In The Time of the Yellow Corn"; and the text is the 5th verse of the 29th chapter of the Book of Job:

"O that I were in the days of old.....how
I long for the autumn of my years - - "

The text demands immediately a second look. For surely if you listened you would have said to yourself- - there's a mistake! Does Job really mean what he said? Can it be that here is a man who is longing for the sunset years of his life? This is contrary to the thinking of most of us!

What we generally say:

"backward, turn backward, O time in your flight,
make me a child again, if only for tonight - - "

....ours is the generation that puts the high premium upon youth, upon middle age. We are not the people who crave age--the sunset years of life. In fact, it's a billion-dollar industry that gathers as its receipts from the attempt on the part of people either to defy or to defeat the prospect of age itself.

- - dollar after dollar.....

hour after hour.....

effort after effort.....so great is the price

that we pay - - to evade, to ignore, to defy old age.

So natural is it to man to long for the days of his youth that even a Bible translator, in an unguarded moment, translated this verse of Job:

"O how I long for the days of my youth - - "

Succeeding translators have corrected the error; for the original Hebrew remains:

"O how I long for the days of my autumn - - "

Can this be so? - - so contrary to popular thought, that a man should wish and pray for the eventide, for the sunset years?

Job was a wise man. Job did not dread the autumn.

This sermon comes to you on this day when we mark the Festival of the Harvest. And the harvest is always a time for reflection. No season in the entire year lends itself so well to spiritual reflection as does autumn.....

...the fruits of the earth...evidence....

...of the corn which is always, the fruit which is ripe..

...the harvest wagons, heavily laden, creaking and groaning

on their way to the store-house

...so I say to you: as in the natural world, so in a man's heart, so in a man's life - - there will be a harvest.

Why? I can't tell you why we place such a high premium upon youth and middle age. Why should we forever allow ourselves to think that these are the better years?

The better years, I submit to you this morning, are the years that lie ahead. The better years should always be the time of the harvest; and the time of the harvest is maturity.....fulfillment...the time of ripened fruit. And toward this end all nature moves. God, from the very beginning, ordained and ordered it that way - - that the harvest years should be the crown of a man's

life.

But alas and alack, ours is the generation that dreads the autumn. We're not too enthusiastic now, are we, with the prospect that medical science gives us that the child that's born today has a life expectancy of 70 years! What with automation, what with early retirement...what with the prospect of vegetation that comes with the slackened pace....we dread autumn. And yet I say to you that maybe you can't possibly appreciate this sermon, if you have any appreciation for it at all, unless you've reached at least 40. For when a man reaches 40, mid-40, he has the prospect of his 50's, recognizing the fact that he has already lived longer than he has yet to live. The mid-30's belong to the junior executive, the man who is chiseling and carving out a career--the man who is forging ahead. But the mid-40's mean only the 50's and the 50's mean the slackened pace....

...when the prizes to be won get fewer and fewer, if any at all
...and where the order of life is that you step aside for
the younger ones

Small wonder, then, that we dread autumn, being put out to pasture - - limited activity.

But no wonder, then, that old age sometimes becomes the age for the cynic. Far from being the time for patience....it becomes the time for impatience. Far from being the time when we can better understand, we begin to ignore and to forget.

Job was a wise man. Job said it was not meant to be that way.

Job says it was meant to be as the time of fulfillment and maturity...

....when a man becomes mellow

....when a man sits back and knows that he doesn't have
to be as foolish and as hotheaded as he was in the

days of his youth

...and he no longer has to suffer the pangs of a conscience that
springs from the impulsive moment

This is what lies ahead.

This is what should lie ahead.

But for some people, the autumn of their years is far from being this.

It's a time of emptiness....melancholy....nostalgia for the days that were.

For some time I've kept within sight in my study this inscription--it's
a quotation from a revered Scotsman. Let me read it for you:

"Brethren, all of us have to face the autumn if we
are granted room and time. Let no man dread it,
if only God is in his heart and is his health and
stay. Under Him, the autumn should be and is the
day of fruit, the time of the yellow corn, the
season of maturity and hope. But without God, or
the presence and promise of Jesus Christ, I can
well believe that I should dread the autumn more
than death itself. For what is any man's autumn
but a grim mockery, if there be no inner harvest?"

(- - James Black)

Says God, you are ordained for fulfillment.

Says God, you are ordained for the time of maturity.

Says God, it has been ordained from the very beginning that springtime should
lead to summer, summer should lead to the autumn, and the autumn is
the time of the yellow corn, the ripened grain....maturity.

But suppose a man should come to the autumn time of his life, and as more
than one person has said, there is no harvest? - - his life is sadly lacking
love, peace, patience, wisdom. The time to get ready for the harvest is in the
springtime of the year. The time to get ready for old age is when one is young!
That's why in a certain sense no one should ever despise youth - - not because
it has a particular glamor and attractiveness all of its own, but because it's
a time of preparation for something else! Who is the venerable statesman from

England who said, as he endured so great affliction when the time that his country called upon him for his greater usefulness- - "If I would have known that some day these legs of mine were to carry a Lord Chancellor of England I would have taken better care of them when I was young."

Every period in life before autumn serves as a preparatory stage....

...and when the harvester goes out into the fields and looks at the ripened grain he remembers how in the springtime he sowed the seed, and as he went field after field his thought was always of the harvest...and every hour that he spent in the early time of the year was geared and directed toward the September that most certainly would come. My heart goes out to people who when they come to the sunset years of their life, when maturation should have set in, and their hearts and their souls are empty...and when they cry out for peace and love and patience and wisdom....

....and their cupboard, their spiritual cupboard, is bare - -
this tragedy!

I also keep handy near my study chair a tiny book with an interesting title - - the cover of which is the color of the fall season of the year - - the title is, "The Seed and the Fruit"...and opposite the introductory page is an unsigned quotation. We can't afford to miss a single word. I want to read it for you very carefully.....

"As the threats of war and the cries of the dispossessed were sounding in his ears, Western Man fell into an uneasy sleep. In his sleep he dreamed that he entered the spacious store in which the gifts of God to men are kept, and addressed the angel behind the counter saying: "I have run out of the fruits of the spirit. Can you re-stock me?" When the angel seemed about to say no, he burst out, "In place of war, afflictions, injustice, lying, and lust, I need love, joy, peace, integrity, discipline. Without these I shall be lost." And the angel behind the counter replied, "We do not stock fruits, only seeds' - - "

(- - Leslie Hunter)

The lamentable thing will be when in the harvest time of our years we think we can get overnight what it may take a lifetime to produce. The harvest time is not the time for the sowing of seeds, it's the gathering, the reaping in.

I say to you with all the ardor of my soul, that the older I become, the more I am convinced that with the charity of God one can forgive easily, if forgiveness were our province, the sins of blind, impatient, ignorant youth

....but who among us can ever deal lightly with the wickedness and the shame which is the emptiness of old men's hearts?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

The time to prepare for autumn, of course, is in the spring. So men need to get ready for old age in the formative years of their lives. None of us can ask at 65 what we did not lay-by in store at an earlier time.

There is a tiny book that I keep within reach of my study chair. It was first published a decade and more ago, and bears the significant title, "The Seed and The Fruit." Authored by Leslie Hunter, its theme is Christian morality in a time of transition. I especially value the book because of this unsigned quotation that appears opposite the introductory page:

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A Sermon: "The Time of The Yellow Corn"

by The Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D.D., Guest Minister

Text - "And Job.....said...oh that I were in the months of
old.....as I was in my autumn days - - "
Job 29:1-5

The text demands an immediate second look. At first reading it appears as a mistake since its fervent wish is quite contrary to the desire of most of us. We crave youth. What seemingly countless numbers of people dread is old age. Dollar after dollar, effort after effort, and anxiety upon anxiety is the price that is paid either to ignore it or to defy it. ~~(One could almost say facial after facial, tint after tint, treatment after treatment.)~~ While we have learned much, what remains to be mastered by an increasingly larger host of people is the lesson of growing old and accepting age itself as a cardinal fact of life.

The temptation to fight age is so common that years ago some Bible translator in an off-moment erroneously, albeit naturally, used the word youth instead of autumn when he dealt with this text. And most of us would never have questioned it so easily have we become accustomed to the "obvious prayer of every broken man - - just to have the chance to live his life again, and be once more a young man of drive and dreams."

Presumably when a man reaches 40 or 50 and it dawns upon him that he has already lived longer than he has yet to live, there is a mind-set that establishes itself and from then on he puts a very high premium upon the zest and the stamina of the 30's which are no more. The future promises the slackened pace and the cherished prizes to be won are fewer and fewer, if any at all.

Come now, does anyone really crave the autumn days, as the man of our text cried out for them? Doesn't nostalgia inevitably set in as we with wistfulness think of other years?

But the closer reading of the entire section in this twenty-ninth chapter of Job brings out clearly that what he wanted so very much was the days of his autumn. Job was a wise man.

Far wiser than we, he knew that while other seasons in a man's life might have their attractive features, only the autumn is characterized by maturity -- the time of fulfillment. His affliction no doubt had gained him wisdom. Miserable creature that he was, he did not ask time to turn back to the days of his spring with all its charm and promise. Nor did he long for summertide. Spring and summer in themselves are but the necessary prelude to autumn. They were never meant to exist for themselves; rather God ordered them from the dawn of time to point to autumn.

Autumn, look about the country-side, is the time of the yellow corn, the ripened fruit, and the harvest wagons heavily laden. Autumn in a man's soul is the season of better judgment, patient and honest deliberation, a quiet and willing waiting upon the Lord. Gone are the unbalanced days of impulsive youth.

Autumn should be for every man a time of harvest. It should be eagerly awaited, never despised. But sadly we admit there are all too many who come to the even-tide of their lives soured and sarcastic, spent and sullied. There is no real harvest because the heart is empty, lacking faith and hope.

For years I have kept before me in my study the quotation that I noted from the wise saying of an old Scotsman:

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we are granted room and time. Let no man dread

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should dread the autumn more than death itself.
For what is any man's autumn but a grim mockery,
if there be no inner Harvest?"

The tragedy of old age can be spiritual bankruptcy. The need for
peace and all the good gifts of the spirit remains but we are impoverished.
Far too much emphasis was given in earlier years to grabbing and holding
that we forgot that life's issues are determined ultimately not by what a
man has but by what he is. The autumn of a man's years can be character's
shining hour! While we may judge less harshly the evil of youth, who can
look lightly upon the shame which is the emptiness in old men's hearts?

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* * *

Remarks made by Pastor Shaheen during the announcement period preceding the sermon on Reformation Sunday, October 28, 1962.....after President Kennedy's report to the nation on Monday, October 22, in which he announced the Cuban blockade.

To say that I stand before you now without any uneasiness in my mind or in my heart would be to speak a lie. In the course of the past hours of the past week each of us, I suppose, has known a measure of fear and trembling - - such is the world in which we have always lived, only in sharper focus within the past week.

But with complete candor and honesty, I could not find it, neither in my mind nor in my heart, to alter the order in Saint Luke Church one bit. What's happening today in Saint Luke Church right now is what had been planned over the weeks and months....the hymns that we will be singing today--each which speaks strangely to the condition of our souls, had been chosen at least two weeks ago. And the sermon that's to be preached was the sermon that could speak to the basic condition of your heart and mind also, had also been planned weeks, months, before this particular Sunday.

There is no change in the pattern of the service today.

We are praying for peace....

We are praying for forgiveness.....

We are praying for wisdom from on High....

As Sunday by Sunday we have come to hear the preaching of the Gospel,
so we come again today.

As Sunday by Sunday we have come, aware of the fact that we are in league
with the eternal,

so today we come....a little bit more aware of our dependence
upon Him who standeth above all, mindful of every condition
and circumstance of all peoples on the face of the earth

It would be a healthy thing if all that we'd shared before on any other Sunday
could go a little bit deeper today, just a little bit deeper....then might we be
able to appreciate what we always have had and what we ought never to lose.

October 28, 1962

"THE MEANING OF REFORMATION"

The sermon bears the title, "The Meaning of Reformation."

The morning mail, of course, always brings a variety...this thing - - that thing....something that someone's promoting....this piece a little bit more clever than something else. Not too long ago there was a letter from some publishing house advertising a pageant to be used on Reformation Sunday, encouraging Protestant churches, in place of the regular service, to present a pageant entitled, "Hammer Blows That Shook the World."

Had I purchased the material, had I suggested that we follow it today, instead of greeting you here inside the Nave of Saint Luke Church, we would have gathered as a congregation outside on the church lawn (a perfect day for it, of course)....and as you would have gathered out there, we would have selected one of our members, say someone like Richard Ahlberg, to portray the part of Martin Luther. We would have made him appear as much like Martin Luther as it would be possible, dressed in Martin Luther's gown, having in one hand a hammer with a few nails, and then in the other hand a parchment, on which he would have lettered 95 propositions for debate--95 things that he felt ought to be corrected or discussed, concerning the health of the Christian Church.

And as he would walk rather defiantly toward the red doors of Saint Luke, Mr. Graner together with all of our choirs would lead us in singing majestically: "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God".....and then this impersonator of Martin Luther would nail to the red doors of Saint Luke his parchment, with rather an air of defiance step aside...

...and psychologically then we would say to ourselves---

...."our man Martin in Wittenberg, he surely started something, didn't he?

I didn't buy the material...for two reasons:

First, it doesn't appeal to me personally.

Secondly, it's fallacious, fallacious in its intent, to allow us to believe that our man Martin began the Reformation. This is not true.

Martin Luther may be the chiefest of all reformers, but he was not the first! and God willing, not the last!

The sermon today bears the title, "The Meaning of Reformation"....carefully titled, it is not "The Meaning of The Reformation" ...it's "The Meaning of Reformation".....for the principle of reformation is something upon which God smiles and God permits, within all groups of Christendom and throughout the period of Christendom. I am here this morning by sacred trust to remind you that reformer that he was, Martin Luther was not the first....and that the principle of reformation was operative long before the 16th century.

In fact, if you went to, when you think of John the Baptist - -

...you can think of John the Baptist in the role of the reformer - - he it was who came crying as a voice in the wilderness.....

"repent....."

"restore....."

"revive....your true and proper picture of God"

...it was Jesus Christ, if you please, who came as God's Great Reformer in person, to re-vitalize those who were interested in the Kingdom in His day

...it was Jesus Christ as the Itinerant Preacher,
going from one Judean, Galilean village to another,
trying to bring to the people's attention the error
in their religious thought and practice, and to
bring them into vital relationship with their Heavenly
Father

...the Apostle Paul, dealing with the church in its incipient
stage, found it necessary to call into practice the prin-
ciple of reformation....again, frequently, he had to
shake his finger at them and say - - "What you are doing
is contrary to the spirit of Jesus Christ."

....Martin Luther, chiefest of the reformers, was not the first reformer

...and God willing, he should not be the last. The principle of reformation,
with the smile of God's favor upon it, is operative throughout the history of
the church.

Church history has always appealed to me and I read with a great deal
of interest that even in the 3rd century, the 4th century - - all down toward
the 16th century, there were those whom God raised up to be a vital witness to
the principle of reformation.

In the 3rd and 4th century there are those who said:

- - "You make a mistake when you make too much of the
Cause of Christ as an institution"

In each succeeding year, in each succeeding generation, there are those
who said:

- - "The principle of reformation demands that there be
no distinction between clergy and lay - - that any

man who knows the love of God - -

that any man who responds to Jesus Christ as his Redeemer - -

....together they are equal in the sight of God

- - there is no distinction."

And for century after century there were those in the Christian Church who said that if a man became a priest, if a man became a monk, he had an advantage, even within the gate of Heaven, as over against the humble cobbler, who while he might have faith in Jesus Christ, claim Him as his Redeemer, he would not wear the monk's robe and could not stand with folded hands before an altar.

There were those, even before the day of Martin Luther, who said:

- - "The teachings and the practices of our church are becoming corrupt...we cannot square them off with what the church knew when she was young."

I say to you this morning - - the principle of reformation has been operative in the Christian Church from the very beginning, and must continue with us. That's why I would not have you to believe that the Reformation was something that began with Martin Luther and ended in his day. The principle of reformation must continue with us even now.

That's why I have no enthusiasm to come this morning to talk about the split in Christendom, or to align myself with you as over against the Roman Catholic Church...

...despise as I may what is fast becoming what might

be referred to as the Cult of the Virgin Mary

...question as I will such dogma as the infallibility of one man when he even speaks in the name of the church

...question as I may the assumption of the Blessed Mother

...question as I will, and fight against it as I would,

making Mary co-redemptress with Christ

...yet I have not come here this morning to talk about the abuses that could be named in any other branch of Christendom in an age....

....in a time.....

in an hour such as ours....when all of us could

be so precariously, dangerously close to the

abyss.....it doesn't behoove any man to reach

for a stone to hurl toward another man who also claims the name of
Jesus Christ.

The principle of reformation must always be operative among any people who take the name of Christ. And I have come here as your Pastor this morning to ask you to see how operative the principle of reformation could be in our lives in our congregation.....

- - what is there that needs to be restored in Saint Luke Church,
as over against the pattern of the New Testament church?
- - where, you and I might ask, are we, as a people, deviating
from Biblical Christianity?
- - where are we, as a congregation, putting more trust, far more
respect, in anything other than Jesus Christ?

The principle of reformation must be operative with us.....now.

If reformation means anything at all, it means restoration.

Restoration to what? Restoration to what Jesus Christ intended

His church to be.

And how do we know what Jesus Christ intended His church to be?

It's the Bible that gives us the pattern, and

we have before us the illustration of the New Testament church, which was essentially a fellowship where men and women were united by the bond of Jesus Christ...where they were gathered together by the witness of the Holy Spirit---and they had Jesus Christ in common.

Maybe that's the point at which the reformation principle must become operative in Saint Luke Church: where you and I begin to ask ourselves, do we have the image of New Testament Christian fellowship?

...or when we think of our Christian witness, do we first think of an organization?

...or when we think of our Christian witness, do we first think of an institution?

...or when we think of our Christian church, do we first think of our particular Lutheran brand?

....The principle of reformation says: "Restore - - and be restored!"....to the image of the New Testament Christian fellowship - - where each person baptized by the Holy Spirit claimed another person as one in Christ, together with all others.

The principle of reformation must be operative for us as long as we can turn again, reverently and frequently, to the Scriptures. For according to the principle of reformation, the Scriptures are sufficient to lead us to Jesus Christ. How well do you know your Scriptures? How well do you read your Scriptures? How well, should I ask Sunday after Sunday, when you come to this place, is the Good Book open, and is the preaching rooted and grounded in Scripture? This is the question that has to be asked. And I would be untrue to you and to

my call if in the proclamation of the Gospel I ever gave you anything less than what was Scripturally true and according to the proclamation of the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Gustav Alayn (?) in his book on the church, maintains that nothing should ever be allowed to exist in the name of Jesus Christ unless it leads people to Jesus Christ, and anything that stands as a barrier to Jesus Christ should be removed. So we have to restore our lives. So we have to take our selveshow operative is the principle of reformation in Saint Luke Church?

For the thing that greatly disturbed Martin Luther, chiefest of all reformers, was this: that the church that he loved, the Church of Rome, could be set to stand as a kind of stumbling-block to Jesus Christ. That ought never to be said of this church. That ought never to be said of this congregation.

I share with you, as Pastor to people, what ought to be a measure of joy ...not everyone could be as articulate as somebody else - - but in this group of people to be received into our fellowship at the 11:00 o'clock hour, there is one who said, "If I were to be asked why I have come, I have come because God is very real to me through Saint Luke Church - - Here I come to know Jesus Christ." If this should be true, and God grant that it is, the principle of the Reformation is an on-going fact in this congregation! And this is the justification of our existence, this is our purpose in being.

I know not what the future may hold in store. With all my heart I believe that the future is held in the hand of Jesus Christ....and to that end on this Reformation Sunday we commit ourselves anew in the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ...

....it is the Gospel that brings us in league with eternity

...it's the Gospel that brings us on to the side of God

...and if a man isn't on God's side, nothing else matters.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

November 4, 1962

"THE INHERITANCE OF THE SAINTS"

The sermon bears the title, "The Inheritance of The Saints" and the text is from the first chapter of Paul's Letter to the Colossians, portions of the 12th to the 14th verses:

"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:
Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: "

Whether you recognize it at once or not, here is a verse of Scripture that's saying what you have always hoped that somebody would tell you, for what this text is really saying is this: that right now, here in this present earth, it's possible to get a taste of Heaven!

Now this is what you've always hoped that someone would tell you, isn't it? that Heaven ought not to be something that's delayed into the far indefinite future, and that concerning it there might always be a question mark as to whether or not you could enjoy it, as to whether or not you could inherit it.

Now I realize, my friend, immediately I say this to you, that one ought never to read more into the text than what is there, and yet, at the same time, one is in duty bound to appreciate fully what is implicitly stated. Let me read it for you once more, and then you can take your own word for it, if for the moment you're not inclined to take mine - - it could be as good as all that!:

"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:
Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son - - "

I can't put it for you any more plainly than to say this to you:
Paul is saying to a believing group of Christians - -

"You get a taste of Heaven here on earth.....right now.

Thanks be to Jesus Christ--give Him credit for it - -
you're being made a partaker of the inheritance of
the saints.....now.

Thanks be to Jesus Christ, He has translated you from
the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light,
and that translation is taking place.....now."

Well don't misunderstand me, I am not saying that this text permits you to believe that Heaven, in its perfect consummation, will be experienced here on earth. The text does not allow this.

But the text does permit us to believe that we get a taste of Heaven, a foretaste, if you please.....now.....that Heaven itself is not something that must be delayed until the moment of death. This is an exceedingly precious truth and ought to be cherished by every believer.

To appreciate it to the full we'd better go back and understand something of the historical setting. How was it that Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians? and why would he seem to think that this was the thing that had to be spelled out very carefully? Why did he think that they were missing this important truth?

Paul was in prison; and while he was in jail he received some visitors; and one of the visitors who came to see him was a man by the name of Epaphras, who had journeyed all the way from Asia Minor where there was a community of Christians in a town called Colossae. Paul himself had never been there, and he was quite eager to hear how things were going.

Alas and alack, however, the more Epaphras talked with him, the more

he became disheartened and disturbed, because Epaphras told him that there in that Asia Minor town there had developed a heresy. Widespread and rampant was the teaching by certain groups that was completely alien to the Gospel. It was a strange kind of thing that was being promulgated - - a kind of mixture between Jewish ritualism and Oriental mysticism....and coupled with all this was the idea that this world doesn't matter much, because matter is basically evil, God is pure spirit.

Now Paul began to mull this thing back and forth in his mind: if people think this about God, then all of this is going to determine the way they live here on earth. You know that, don't you? - - that what a man believes determines how he behaves? You know, don't you, that creed is always the cause for conduct? You can't possibly separate what you believe about God from the way you act, because what you believe about God determines the way you're going to live.

In all likelihood Paul had some sleepless nights because he recognized that if this thing were to go on in Colossae, if this heresy should prevail, then the Christian faith itself would be imperiled, and there was this terrible likelihood that one day, eventually, the Christian faith could be destroyed by such a false teaching, if no one reminded the believers of the precious Gospel by which they should live.

One of the things that also disturbed Paul was this idea of God being pure spirit. Now, of course, God is spirit. But this God whom we come to know in Jesus Christ is a God who invades the world, and who invaded the world in the form of Jesus Christ. And when Jesus Christ came into the world He took upon Himself the form of a man - - flesh and blood. God can do that.

But then it must have occurred to Paul, well now, if these heretics in Colossae can say that God is nothing but pure spirit, they will eventually refuse

to accept the saviourhood of Jesus Christ!

...because Jesus Christ had a body - - this is matter
flesh and blood is something material...

...and if they reject the saviourhood of Jesus Christ, they reject the cardinal
principle of the Christian religion - -

...and if they reject the saviourhood of Christ, if they go on thinking about
matter as evil - -

then why shouldn't a man live in this world in immorality?

why should he care about his appetite?

why not eat, drink, be merry?

if matter is evil, my body is evil - - why take

good care of it?

....so Paul, greatly disturbed, sat and wrote these Christians in Colossae a
letter.

And the heart of his letter is the recognition of the pre-eminence of
Jesus Christ.

He is God.

And God saw fit to come into this world.

Now if God saw fit to come into this world, then this world is important,
for God deals only with important things.

And if God saw fit to let Jesus Christ have a body, flesh and blood - -
something material - - then this flesh and blood, this material
existence of mine, is important....this present world counts.

And so that they would not misunderstand, Paul says - -

"Do you realize that Jesus Christ has translated you in this kingdom,
into the next?

"Do you realize that Jesus Christ now has made possible for you the inheritance of the saints in light?

"Do you realize that right now, in this present world, we get a taste of heaven - - it isn't something that's out off - - "

I suppose they looked at each other when they got this letter and said,

"I'm not so sure," said one to another, "that we can accept this because we are still in this world. I still have to earn a living. An hour from now I'm going to be hungry--I still have to eat. What does Paul mean when he says Jesus Christ has translated us from the kingdom of this world into the kingdom of the next? What does Paul mean when he says that Jesus Christ has made it possible for us here in this world to enjoy the inheritance of the saints?"

...they could understand about when a man dies he would go to heaven, and then he could inherit everything God had put in store for him.....but to share in that inheritance right now?it was not easy to understand.

And yet this is the heart of the Gospel, for the simple reason that Heaven is not something that begins the moment a man dies. Lest I run the risk of being misunderstood nonetheless, I am in duty bound to say it to you: Heaven isn't something that's absolutely brand new! While it can't be compared to anything that we've known here on earth, while it may be said that 'eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard' the wonder and the beauty and the majesty that await us in Heaven.....yet Heaven begins at the point where you and I leave off here! We're always talking about life eternal. Well, if life everlasting is something that doesn't have an end, then glory be! you and I are involved in it right now! Let me say to you again - - Heaven just doesn't begin the moment a

man dies. Right now we're in the process.

What is Heaven? Heaven is where Jesus Christ is recognized for all that He is, and where people are given to love and to serve Him with all that they have and all that they are. The Kingdom of Heaven is where Jesus Christ rules completely---perfectly. The Kingdom of Heaven is where all of this is brought into consummation, its fulfillment.

But God has seen fit to introduce us to His Son who is our Saviour...here,
right now.

The inheritance which will be fully ours in the Kingdom to come - -

it's being made available to us in part right now.

If I did not believe it, I would not come back to this pulpit next Sunday.

If I did not believe it, I would not go on being a minister of the Gospel of
the Lord Jesus Christ.

For what is it to introduce a man to Jesus Christ if it isn't to introduce him to Heaven? Because we have the limitations of this world, we cannot appreciate it to the full, but we can have a taste of it.

I walked away from our services last Sunday, especially at the 11:00 o'clock hour, with my heart strangely stirred....a group of new people being received into this fellowship of God which is Saint Luke Church--seven of them in young adulthood were being baptized or confirmed--being named for Jesus Christ.....think you not for a single minute that they did not receive a taste of Heaven!...as they knelt in their moment before God? The inheritance of the saints is being made available to them in part right now.

It's always difficult for me as a pastor to be called to comfort those who have known great sorrow, and someone in their circle has died. If there is reason for me to be able to say that without a doubt there should be no fear, no anxiety,

because this person in this life had lived according to the light which he had known in Jesus Christ, then we have reason to believe that when they die there is this glorious continuation....

....but with this pastor's heart of mine, as God gives it to me, I would speak the lie if I would ever permit myself to think or to say that if a man in this world remained alien to Jesus Christ that we would have a right to believe that in the moment of death he would be able to share fully and completely the inheritance of the saints- - - why not nearly as much as the person in this world whose Christian character day by day reflected something of the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Paul says - - "Give thanks to God because He has made this possible;
He's given you the opportunity right now in this world
to partake in the inheritance of the saints, and Jesus
Christ is translating you from the kingdom of darkness
into the power of light - - it's happening now - - "

When you recognize the integrity of this text it does two things for you:

....it gives you a great measure of comfort.

Beloved, if you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and
Saviour - - you're on your way to Heaven.....now.

.....what glorious assurance this could bring to you

....but on the other hand, what a great challenge--what a great
responsibility!

For if you're heaven bound, then God expects us to behave like
the saints, to share something of Heaven's perfect peace
and love right now.

Beloved, this is the glory of the Christian religion - - it's ours,

but one day even more so than we've ever imagined....

....and when it happens, we'll feel at home--up there - -

because it's taking place right now.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD"

The sermon today is another in the series based upon passages of Scripture from Paul's letter to the Colossians. The sermon bears the title "All The Fullness of God" and the text is the 19th verse of that first chapter to the Colossians:

"For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell."

When you read these eight verses of the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians, verses 15 to 23, you will find that there's something like an overflowing fountain - - the words keep pouring forth from the lips of the Apostle Paul. He just couldn't keep quiet. He couldn't speak enough soon enough. He was compelled to establish clearly in the minds of the people to whom this letter was being written that Jesus Christ is pre-eminently, fully, perfectly, completely God.....and by the time the Apostle Paul got finished speaking--by the time he got finished writing, he didn't want any doubt to exist in anyone's mind as to what he, as one person, thought about Jesus Christ: for him Jesus Christ wasn't just another prophet - -

He wasn't just another teacher - -

...for him, Jesus Christ is GOD

- - clearly, distinctly,

perfectly, uniquely, completely

...wholly everything that God is, is in Jesus Christ.

Now you'll have to appreciate why Paul went to all this trouble.

By the way, no page in the New Testament, no writer of any letter to any group of Christians ever put it as strongly and as clearly as Paul does in

this letter to the Colossians when he talks about the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ, and the fact that Jesus Christ is God.

Now, you can't appreciate this if you don't recognize something of the historical background of the text. Paul had had a visitor from these Christians in Colossae. The visitor, Epaphras, told him that things were not going as well as things ought to go - - in fact, there was a heretical group. This heretical group was known as the Gnostics. Highly intellectual, highly philosophical - - they had devised some kind of a scheme of creation, very clever indeed, but it left God out of the picture. For they said the world had to be created out of something. The world had to be created out of matter. That you just don't create a world out of nothing. So when God went to create the world, He had to create it out of material substance...

...and these highly intellectual, philosophical people said,

"But matter is basically evil, and God is pure spirit,
and spirit alone is good....how then could God, who is
pure spirit, have anything to do with matter, which is
pure evil?"

...and so their very clever scheme said, well God had going
out from Him, throughout the periods of time, an infinite
number of agents, a series of aeons or emanations, and it
was one of these agents who had something to do with
creation....God Himself was not directly involved....

...and as Paul listened to Epaphras - - "Tell me more, Epaphras!

This is a strange teaching--give me the whole story!

--that I might know the full implication - - "

of what already appeared to him as a heresy.

...so Epaphras probably told him, "Well, Paul, this isn't the end of it. They

also teach and preach, this heretical group, that the farther these agents got away from God, the less divine was their nature; in fact the one who dealt with creation (because God, being pure spirit, couldn't touch evil matter) - - in fact the one who was the creative agent actually became hostile to God and was an enemy of God!"

Now Paul, presumably, began to scratch his head and began to think very soberly.....

"Well now, what is this going to do to Jesus Christ?

Because we as Christians declare that Jesus Christ is God, and that when God came into the world He came in the form of Jesus Christ, used flesh and blood. Aha," says Paul, "If these people down there at Colossae say that matter is evil, flesh and blood is matter--this is material substance! - - then it's impossible for God to come in human form!"

...and Epaphras says, "That's right, Paul. That's what they're saying. In fact they say, when they talk about Jesus, that He was a phantom, that He was a spirit in some kind of bodily form, but this bodily form wasn't really matter at all because when He walked He didn't even leave any foot-prints in the sand!"

Now all of this, you see, eventually denies the manhood, the essential humanity of Jesus Christ. And when you start denying the humanity of Jesus Christ you reduce from the picture an element essential to the saviourhood of Jesus Christ, and the capability of God great enough to use human form.

So Paul mulled over this quite a bit.

He couldn't sleep, as I told you last week - - undoubtedly he had sleepless nights thinking:

"what's going to happen to the Christian faith if
Jesus Christ is ultimately ruled out of the picture?
The glory which is Christianity's is the pre-eminence
of Jesus Christ! The glory of your faith and mine is
that there's no question about it for us - - Jesus
Christ is God...."

So Paul wrote in this letter, and he kept hammering away, first of
all upon the fact that God created the world--that God did it Himself, direct-
ly, and then he brings Jesus Christ into the picture. And Paul says that
Jesus Christ was God's agent in creation; and when Paul talks about Jesus
Christ he says that He is the image of the invisible, He is God in the flesh.
Says the Apostle Paul - -

"God saw fit to come in the form of Jesus Christ
and all the fullness which is God is in Jesus
Christ."

Remembering the words of Jesus Christ Himself, he says - -

"He who hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

"Jesus Christ said, if anyone wants to know
what God is like, look at Me! This is the
full picture, this is the complete picture,
this is the perfect picture! There is noth-
ing about God that isn't in Me! - - - "

...We reverently, you see, every now and then when we recite the Nicene Creed:

" - - Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being
of one substance with the Father, By whom all things
were made- - "

Jesus Christ is God and all the fullness of God is embodied in Jesus Christ.

Ah, you have heard this all your lives.

You've been reciting the fact that Jesus Christ is God 'Very God of very God, Begotten, not made' ...and there's been no threat to your Christian faith. You've never had anyone stand in this pulpit and say to you that the witness of the Lutheran church to the saving grace of Jesus Christ is erroneous, it's incorrect. You've never had anyone come into your life and shake his finger at you and say, "It's a fallacious teaching that you Christians proclaim to the world." You've been fairly secure in the knowledge that Jesus Christ is God. Few if any have endeavored to shake or even to take it away from you. That's why it might be even difficult for you to appreciate the full intent of this sermon at this point. You've never doubted the fact that Jesus Christ is God.

But in the church in Colossae, like a malignant growth, spreading like wild-fire across the congregation - -

"Jesus Christ isn't God.....He's just one of God's
agents--far removed from God."

...and when people had that kind of talk thrown at them, the Apostle Paul raised a salient question:

Well then, how is a man saved?

For the Christian faith proclaims that since all the fullness of God is embodied in Jesus Christ, you and I are saved through our faith in Jesus Christ who is God alone, able to save us.

Well then, how is a man saved if you take away the uniqueness of Jesus Christ?

Said the Gnostics, "We have an answer for that. A man is saved if he has

certain intellectual superiority, if he has a certain advantage over other people and he can find a way through this maze of agents to God. For a man is never content until he can get directly to God.

And the Gnostics said, "You can get to God all right; it may take you a long, long time, and you have to go through any number of different agents until you finally reach Him; and only those who have an intellectual superiority will succeed in being saved - - "Take away the uniqueness which is Jesus Christ as God and you take away the open, the direct door by which the redeemed enter.

So Paul said, "All that God is you have in Jesus Christ."

This sentence gives pause for reflection: 1) do you appreciate the fullness of God which is in your Saviour, Jesus Christ? Do you day by day recognize the fact that the resources of God are being made available for you through Christ? All that God is can be yours - - now. You need not lack for any good thing from the hand of God. Come strain or stress, trial or tribulation, God is there, and the faithful, the committed to Jesus Christ, can draw upon those resources. The most pathetic figure in the world is the man who is suddenly confronted by an emergency and has no resources upon which to draw.....and this should never be the picture of the Christian! In the face of any untoward circumstance Jesus Christ, your Redeemer, is there to uphold you, to make available all the resources of God against the demand of any present moment...

...why, then will you waver?

...why, then, will you hesitate?

...why, then, will you walk as those who have no faith?

...says the Apostle Paul, "I know whom I believe and I am persuaded that He is
able - - - "

The second observation is this: this wonderful blessing which is yours in Christ Jesus - - all the fullness of God coming to you in Christ - - was never meant for you and for you alone. This is meant for other people, too. God never gives Himself to you just for you to keep.

Just before this service began I went down to Fieber Hall and I said to one of the men teaching Sunday School - - "Much that I, as one person, have in the Christian faith I owe to my Sunday School teacher - -"

...but suppose it had never been shared with me?

...suppose this fullness of God in Jesus Christ had never been told?

- - then when you come to die, you would die without hope!

- - then as you live day by day, you would live without strength,

without a divine purpose motivating and directing your life!

This has come to us--the grace of God which is sufficient comes as a gift

...that was never meant for you and for you alone.

It's significant that this sermon should be preached on this Sunday which is the day that launches the Every Member Visitation into the parish...

...for what are these men going to say ultimately, when they come into your home, except this:

"We are here as your fellow-members to give you

an opportunity to share the fullness of God

which is yours in Christ Jesus."

What is the business of Saint Luke Church (one hesitates to use the figure of speech) - - what is the holy task, what is the holy obligation, but to tell other people of the saving grace of Jesus Christ?

And how can we do that? - except our hands be upheld...

How can a program share the Cause of Jesus Christ unless it be maintained?

And in the final analysis, no man can ever fully appreciate what is his until he first shares it with somebody else.

...All the fullness of God in Christ Jesus is ours---we don't need anything else from God's hand. Jesus Christ is everything.

The story comes first-hand from the mission field...when a native was told for the first time of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, the total adequacy of Jesus Christ to save us. Overwhelmed by the tremendous truth of the fullness of God in Christ Jesus - - "and when did this Jesus come into the world?

...when did all of this happen? ...when did God reveal Himself fully and completely in Christ?"

...and the missionary said, "Oh, it happened almost two thousand years ago."

"Two thousand years ago this wonderful thing happened!

- - Why didn't anybody tell me before?"

This fullness of God that we have in Christ Jesus is meant for us and for all mankind. And believe me, beloved, when I say to you: very shortly now, when the offering plate comes to you and you take of your substance and put upon the altar - - that substance dedicated at the altar wings its way into all the world to tell men and women that Jesus Christ alone is adequate to save.

"In Him," says the Apostle Paul, "all that God is dwells - -"

....and you and I are the most fortunate of all people,

because it's happened to us,

....but it's never been meant for us alone.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded.)

"EVERY MAN - - "

Today's sermon is another in the series based upon Paul's letter to the Colossians. The sermon bears the title, "Every Man"; and the text, the 28th verse of the 1st chapter:

"Whom we preach warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

Let me read the 20th verse too:

"Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily."

It's been some time now since I heard her, perhaps six, eight weeks. A stranger in our land, she asked for the privilege to come and address the group of which I was part. As I think of her now I could also use this descriptive: she was an old woman in a hurry. Perhaps seventy-five, eighty years of age, she had been in our country for about a dozen years. She had come here because she was a refugee - - a refugee at her age, unwilling to live any longer under the threat of a freedom which she cherished which would be taken away from her and from her people.

The country from which she came is now under Soviet domination. Living here in the United States, she's going from one group after another, almost breathlessly--I don't know when I've seen a woman with so much strength and dynamism. The burden of her message was this - -

"We took freedom for granted...we thought it could

never be taken away from us

It has been taken away from us

Now I'm running all over your country, at my own expense....

I represent no one except freedom's holy cause
And I'm saying to you what I'm saying to everyone,
as often as I can to as many people as I can:
Freedom is a precious thing....you have it....guard
it carefully

Not meaning to be an alarmist," said she, - - "you could
lose it - - other people have."

As I remember her I remain profoundly grateful that with this great passion
she felt as many should hear what she had to say, even though her days were
numbered.

...old woman in a hurry?

...stranger in our land?

...woman with a cause?

- - she reminds me of the Apostle Paul.

The Apostle Paul in writing to the Christians in Colossae was telling
those faithful people there that they ought to appreciate what they already
had in Jesus Christ. By this time, with all these sermons being preached on
Colossians since the first of the fall season, you ought to know that the
Christian faith was being threatened in Colossae....that there was a group of
people preaching and teaching that Jesus Christ was not God.

Paul says to the Colossians:

"Put Jesus Christ is God. And you, a handful of
people, you faithful Christians - you know it!

Let me ask you to appreciate it to the full!"

....for Christians are, of all people, the most fortunate on earth;
for when they have seen Jesus Christ they have seen all that God is!

The greater tragedy in life is not always that something is taken away - - that a man suddenly gets awake one morning and finds that what he had yesterday isn't there. Tragic as this may be, the greater tragedy is that a man might always have something, but never call it by name, never appreciate it to the full. This is the greater tragedy: not to lose, but to have, and not to possess.

So the Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians - - to the faithful people:

"You know that Jesus Christ is God.

You know that when God revealed Himself in Jesus

Christ He gave His last and complete word

when Jesus Christ said 'He who hath seen Me

hath seen the Father' - - 'Whoever looks at

Me knows exactly what God is like!'"

The Apostle Paul said:

"This wasn't always so. You've read your history - -

there was a time before Jesus Christ. There was a

time when God was cloaked in mystery...when all that

God is was not revealed.

But then one day God sent Jesus Christ into the world;

and you people to whom He has come--you are the saints!

Not everyone knows that Jesus Christ is God...not everyone.

Only some of you. And you're numbered in that group.

Appreciate it to the full!"

"Now, says the Apostle Paul, "As over against this threat

to our faith, we who know that Jesus Christ is God must

everlastingly be after this business of telling other people."

And that's where the text comes in for today's sermon:

"Whom we preach warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus;"

Let's take one thing at a time.

"Whom we proclaim - - "

Paul was talking to the faithful Christians in Colossae, that Asia Minor town, and he uses the collective pronoun "we" - - "you and I together" - - "we're proclaiming Jesus Christ."

...but are we? - - as Paul intended Jesus Christ to be proclaimed? When we talk about Jesus Christ to other people, when we share Jesus Christ with other people, are we sharing Jesus Christ as God? It's one thing to share Jesus Christ as the carpenter's son, that very fine young man who with so great dedication went from village to village talking to people about the better life; it's one thing to share Jesus Christ as the Master Teacher...it's one thing to share Jesus Christ as brother and friend - - all of these He isbut He is ever so much more. He is God.....'Very God of Very God - - ' .

I'm not thinking particularly of the threat to the Christian religion, but the fastest growing religious groups in the world today. And the fastest growing religious groups in the world today are the non-Christian groups. I haven't the statistics for you, and it's just as well for you, perhaps, that I haven't because it would be too disheartening: how many more converts Islam is getting in Africa as over against the converts the Christian Church can chalk up. The fastest growing religious groups in the world today: those who declare that Jesus Christ is not God. Part and parcel of the very fiber of all that they teach is to down-grade Jesus Christ. And a distressing thing is this: that even among those who take the name of Jesus Christ there are those who,

when they talk about Jesus Christ, see Him as something less than God; and whenever Jesus Christ is seen as anything less than God He is never seen as He is.

...And to talk about Jesus Christ as anything less than God is to deny yourself a Saviour. For even a deity made in the likeness of men, with the emphasis upon the human feature, is unable to save us. Only God, come to us garbed in human flesh for a while, is able to redeem.

Says the Apostle Paul, this is the Christ we proclaim:

...not the teacher, not the friend, not the brother, not
the master workman....

- - but the Redeemer of all mankind.

....and the one who can best share Jesus Christ as Redeemer
is the man who knows himself forgiven by Jesus Christ.

The second thing that a man must recognize in the test is:

"Whom we proclaim - - "

- yes -

"warning every man, teaching every man, that we may
present every man perfect in Christ Jesus - - "

Every man? Do you and I honestly believe that every man has the potential
for the Kingdom of God?

Paul was tremendously concerned with the Christians in Colossae because they were being told that only a limited number of people could apprehend God ...only a limited number of people would be offered salvation.....only the intellectually superior. Down through the years there has always been the tendency to make God the exclusive right, the exclusive property of only a limited number of people. Do you know that a devout Jew, centuries before Jesus Christ, used to offer to God as a daily prayer - - "O God, I thank Thee that I am not a

slave, a woman or a Gentile"? Do you know that the world into which Christianity was born, the Roman-Graeco world, that even among the Greeks there was the well-defined notion that only a limited number of people could always have the benefit of the finer and the better of the things in life, spiritually speaking?that there were ordained even from the beginning of time certain people who would be subject to others - - always the inferior? Into a world like that Christianity was born.

Walter Lippmann is not right when he wrote a number of years ago that the idea of a teacher being able to make his wisdom applicable and understood by all people is a fallacious notion. Walter Lippmann maintains in one of his writings that from the dawn of time any great teacher has always admitted that the wisdom that he taught could be understood by only a limited number of people.....

..Call Jesus Christ the great teacher if you will....call Him the sharer of the wisdom of God, and I say this to you: the basic Christian understanding of the wisdom of God is that it's available to any man - - to every man. The Christian religion maintains that any man, every man, should be offered the opportunity by which to respond to the grace of God.

In the days of the Colossians, this threat to the Christian faith included the notion that there were some people that you could forget all about; that you talked about God only to certain people. The peculiar thing about heresy, the peculiar thing about sin is this: it raises its ugly head in every generation, and certain characteristics remain, even though we may not call them by name.

I say to you this morning with complete candor, that you and I are always being confronted by the temptation to believe that this Jesus Christ of ours belongs to only people of our kind. We, too, become the exclusive ones.

I'm not talking, now, about color alone. I'm talking about prestige--certain standards in life that some of us have maintained that, we think, well, these belong to our company. There is always the tendency on your part and on my part to talk about Jesus Christ and even to share Jesus Christ with those who are of our temperament, to those who are of our station in life - - to those that we think are the likely ones.....and we're not at all disposed to waste any time on the unpromising folk. This, too, is the exclusiveness which can become the threat to the 20th-century Christian.

I keep before me as a kind of indictment--not a matter of apocryphy, not a matter of legend....but the chap who came out of godless Russia, a generation ago, a visitor here in these United States....for some unexplainable reason he went to a Christian church, I suppose looking much like the beat generation of our day. No one paid any attention to him. They just didn't think he was promising enough (they just didn't think he was worth paying any attention to) ...and the story of that man's life includes the chapter that he never again gave Christianity as much as a half a chance.

Oh, it's not always as dramatic as that, but there are people within the confines of our own family circle, there are people within the confines of the neighborhood where we live, the place where we work, even the group to which we may belong.....we have written them off the record as not being likely to respond...we brand them the spiritually insensitive. Whether we use the word or not, it's always there - - the unlikely ones - - those without promise.

I'm sorry, I can't read the text any differently. Paul happened to say exactly what he meant, and his repetition is emphatic:

"Whom we preach to every man, warning, teaching every man, that he might become perfect in Christ Jesus - - "

You know, don't you, that Paul wasn't considered a very likely prospect for the Christian cause? Militant, arrogant, aggressive, a murderer of Christians.... thanks be to God that there was not only the Holy Spirit, but Ananias, the mag-

nanimous, who was the first person Paul beheld once the scales had fallen from his eyes. And suppose he had met as his first Christian a man who felt that Paul was not a likely prospect for the Kingdom!

"Whom we preach, warning every man, teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ - - "

...Paul honestly believed that a man never knew his full stature, that a man never became a real man until he had met Jesus Christ. You and I are always less than what God meant us to be until we become mature in Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul closes that first chapter of his letter by saying that to this thing he gives himself, all the time, with the energy that God gives him, that any man, every man, might come to know Jesus Christ.

Ah, realistically, you don't always get 100%, and they might not respond; "but," Paul says, "that's not my concern. My concern is that

Jesus Christ came to me, an unlikely one - - this is reason enough to believe that He could come to somebody else - - "

...maybe that's how you and I got into the picture, isn't it?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"EXIT GRATEFULLY"

The sermon on this Thanksgiving Day bears the title, "Exit Gratefully" and the text, the 4th and 5th verses of Psalm 100:

"Be thankful unto him and bless his holy
name
For the Lord is good - - "

There's a tombstone in a Pennsylvania cemetery that bears this inscription:

THANK YOU, GOD, FOR EVERYTHING

...so the Lutheran pastor up there in York County wanted to be remembered and as he took leave from this world he wanted the record to be established that he, for one person at least, was the perpetually grateful.

You and I on occasion have been guests of certain people and we have been the recipients of their favor and their grace, and as we are about to take leave, we turn ever so thankfully and say "Thanks for everything." Suppose my friend should say to me, when I say "Thank you for everything" - -

"For what in particular? Name one thing."

...I ought to be ready to do it. For true gratitude ought never to be a general thanksgiving. It is better expressed when it can be done specifically. Rather, there are two things to be said about the giving of thanks.

One...let it be done personally, let it be done specifically.

No one can say thank you in my behalf. If the word 'thank you' is to be properly spoken,....

...no one can go to my wife and say to her "Your

husband wants me to say in his behalf that
he loves you."

...if the message is to be delivered at all, it has to be delivered personally...
...directly

..by the man whose intention these words actually are.
Gratitude to God must be expressed individually and personally. So this man,
when he died, wanted the whole world to know the ground whereon he stood was
the ground of gratitude, and he wanted to express it himself, even to the very
end.

Gratitude must also be expressed specifically.

The Roman Catholic confessional has a point....when the penitent goes
into a booth, he may begin by saying, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned"...
and then he will be encouraged to name his sins, to declare them one by one.
This is a salutary thing, for it's never enough for you and me to go to bed at
night and with a kind of blanket-coverage deal say, "O God, forgive me all my
sins this day,"

...for we ought to be prepared to hear God say to us,

"..and what sins in particular? name them!"

You and I would know the meaning of forgiveness in a far better way if we al-
lowed our sins to be paraded before our minds individually, seen collectively
has no meaning whatsoever...until you can pinpoint it in this situation, in
this particular deed, at that specific moment.

When I was a youngster in Sunday School we used to sing, ever so glee-
fully - - "Count your many blessings, name them one by one"....there's merit,
of course, in being able to say specifically just what this thing is for which
I am grateful. And so I come to you this morning without hesitation, to name

for you the things for which I, as one person, am grateful to God. Perhaps the list could be yours. Listen now to the testimony of one man.....

"Thank you, God, for everything."

...and I hear Him say to me

"and for what in particular?"

Well, first of all, God, I want to thank you that I know you.

I do not believe that in this world of which I am part there is such a thing as a benign influence at work upon my life,

a general source by which benefaction comes to me.

But rather, thanks be to those who have reared and trained me in the faith. I know Him whom I believe. I can read the lines of love upon His face. I can hear the earnestness of His voice.

I can feel the gentle pressure of His hand upon my shoulder, guiding, directing.

I am grateful for the fact that I know Him....that I can call

Him by name.

This is not so for some people. There are some people who believe in a 'divine force'.....there are some people who believe in the 'source of goodness'...in the 'great spirit' abroad throughout the world. But they've never been able to call it by name.....

Thank you, God, for revealing Thyself to me, fully and completely, in the face of Jesus Christ.

It's an exceedingly wonderful thing to be able to know whom to thank. It's vastly different than to say what.

Back in the hills of Pennsylvania to which I delight to go, we have a little place....and one day I discovered that somebody had put there a cord of wood

for our fireplace. To this day I don't know who it was. It's a frustrating thing, to know that somewhere, somehow, life has dealt graciously with you, and you don't know the one to thank. This, you see, is the perplexity of the agnostic, the atheist, who in one grand moment finds his heart overflowing with gratitude and doesn't know whom to thank...

"Thank you, God, for everything"

and first of all I begin with You. I know who You are, and I know that You are good, and I know that you daily smile upon me.

- - and that's the second thing, O God, which I name specifically in my list of blessings...

I thank you, O God, that daily you smile upon me with favor
...that each new day comes as a gift

...that each new day comes as a blessing

In my ministry to the souls of people I have discovered that there are those who dread the prospect of any new day....haunted by the miserable tasks, worn down by the pressures of the present moment....the one thing that they dread is the prospect of tomorrow...

Thank you, God, for giving me the willingness by which I can accept as a blessing each new day.

God's blessing comes to us daily.

In the liturgy of the Lutheran church there are many significant moments. One that ought never to be short-changed or overlooked is very shortly after you've come to worship, and you've confessed your sins to God; and then the officiating minister stands, with the authority given to him by Jesus Christ....

"The Almighty and Merciful God grant unto you,
being penitent, pardon and remission of all

your sins, time for amendment of life, and the
Grace and Comfort of His Holy Spirit."

I thank God for each new day because it's another portion of time
by which I can amend. The sin of yesterday doesn't have to be
repeated today. By the grace of God, the error of one's ways,
with the prospect of another day, need no longer be continued.
I thank you, God, for each new day - - an opportunity by which
to amend one's ways...a gift from Thee by which to live
more gloriously in Thy name.

I thank you, God, for each new day....
...for each new friend.

There was a time when I couldn't say that. There was a time when
people frightened me. I would shy away. I was content to withdraw. But now,
eagerly, I look upon each new friend as God come to me anew; for with my Quaker
friends I would say there is that in every man which is God, and as no two people
are alike, so each new friend in God gives me another accent to God's voice,
another insight to His love. Each new friend is like an unexplored country for
me, for each new friend is a world in himself, a world of relationships that I
might not have had, a world of experiences which I might have never encountered.
I look upon each new friend as God come anew. Brownino is perfectly right when
he says - - "Hush! What if this friend happened to be God!"and when I go
to bed at night, believe you me when I tell you this--the time begins to run out
for me, the list of friends is so great---so you have come to mean this much to
me....

I thank you, God, for each new day
for each new friend....

I thank you, God, for all the unnamed people who have influenced

I am grateful for those whose names I do not know who
invoke God's blessing upon me all the way to the Great Gate.

I thank you, God, for every single person, whether I know them
or not, who take my name in prayer before the Throne of Grace
daily

If for no other reason, they serve for me as stumbling-blocks on the way to Hell.
How dare I allow myself to defect the Kingdom when I know that there are those
who daily pray for the estate of my soul? and this I know happens.

In the conference on baptism last Sunday afternoon someone raised the question:

"Do you have sponsors at the time of baptism in the
Lutheran church?"

....and the answer is yes.

And then the next question:

"Well, what is a sponsor supposed to do?"

...and then I remembered that one day I had that question put to me by a man who
said:

"They want me to be a sponsor for this child,
but I'm leaving for a tour of duty and in all
likelihood I will be out of the country for the
next five years. What can I, a sponsor, do for
this child?"

...and immediately it occurred to me - - well, bless your soul!

...every day of your life, wherever you may be,

you can pray--pray for the soul of this child!

Augustine knew his moment of conversion if for no other reason than for the

my life for good.

In the town in which I grew up there was ~~was~~, in the day of my childhood, but one Roman Catholic family. The five Protestant churches that we had would never so much as make bold to put a cross upon the tower of the spire....so great was the bias against Roman Catholicism. When I was ordained and came back to my home town, it was unthinkable that I should wear a clerical collar, for this was associated with Roman Catholics. For twenty-five years, in the formative years of my life, while my home pastor hoped some day to have an altar in the church, the bias, the prejudice was so great - - "This is Roman...this we dare not have,"against this kind of background I grew up.

With whatever grace God gave me, it began to disappear gradually. The last trace was completely gone when one day I met a man, whose name I do not know, and I am reasonable certain that in this present world I will never see him again. He had taken a group of young people with him to Mt. Nisen in Switzerland, for the same reason that I had taken a small group with me--to see the sunset atop an Alpine peak, and then to go early in the morning to see the sunrise. We recognized each other. I recognized him in his long flowing cassock and I knew him at once to be Roman. He recognized me with my clerical collar, and for certain reasons made obvious to him, knew I was a Protestant. My Flemish was non-existent...he could speak only haltingly in English. The morning when we saw each other after the sun had arisen, and together we descended the peak, he gave me a blessing. As God gives me memory, I shall want to recall them to the very end. He simply said

...I, a stranger...I, a Protestant

...he simply said to me

"I wish for you a safe journey, all the way Home"

...and as he spoke the last words, he punctuated it by casting his eyes
Heavenward.

prayers of Monica, his sainted mother.

I thank God for each new day...

I thank God for each new friend,....

I thank God for unnamed friends.....

I thank God for those who pray for me daily....

I thank God for each new crisis - - -

There was a time when I couldn't say this, I, who yearn for security.

But the Chinese say a crisis is a dangerous opportunity!

I am grateful for the brinkmanship of the past month, for I have lived in that time more soberly than I had prior to that October day. Lawyers have a pious-sounding phrase that they use in legal documents which refers to the acts of catastrophe, tragic ones as they may be. They call it "the acts of God" in which when they can't explain anything else that's tragic, they simply hold the act of God responsible. I say to you that it's an unfair thing to imply that only the tragic and the troublesome and the disastrous come by the hand of God! I say to you, the countless blessings that we enjoy in this world come to us by the hand of God.

When I come to the end of my earthly pilgrimage, I, too, should like to exit gratefully....to thank God for everything that has come to me in this present world. But then I am reasonably certain that whatever light I may have in my eye, the radiance will not be able to match the experience that I will know when I shall see my Saviour face to face. Then I shall say - -

"All this - - and Heaven, too! Thank you!"

Next to the cry for pardon, perchance the most precious words in
the ears of God will be

"Thank you! Thank You, God!"

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE TRUE CHURCH"

Today's sermon is another in the series based upon passages of Paul's letter to the Colossians. The sermon bears the title, "The True Church"; and the text, from the second chapter, portions of the 6 and 7 verses:

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus
the Lord, so walk ye in him:
Rooted and built up in him and established
in the faith in which you have been taught - - "

We must never forget that as we deal with this book, this series of letters that Paul wrote, when he was writing them he was in jail, imprisoned by the decree of the Emperor Nero. When the messenger from Colossae came and began to tell him about the troubles they were having in their congregation, it might have been a very human thing for Paul to say - - "and brother, you think you have troubles? Let me tell you about mine - - !" - - and forth-with he could have enumerated for his visitor the endless amount of tragedy and trouble which had come to him ever since he had decided to become an ambassador for Jesus Christ. Ever so frequently he escaped from one community after another, at the very risk of his life. Paul, therefore, imprisoned, could have very easily drawn a circle around himself. He could have withdrawn from the greater arena of life and could no longer have had a continuing concern in the big issues of life as they were being faced by people who were not in jail.

But this was not the nature of the Apostle Paul. He was made of sterner stuff than that. And while he was not inclined to think only of himself, he did concern himself with what was happening beyond his own little world. This is a page, my friend, that you and I do well to read carefully from the life of the

Apostle Paul, for so frequently when you and I have been dealt a very grievous blow by life itself, we withdraw, we think only of ourselves, and our world becomes smaller and smaller and smaller.....while out there beyond us, in the greater arena of life, the basic struggles that matter most are still being faced by countless numbers of people. And it can become a salutary thing for any man when tempted to withdraw to remember that he is still part of the greater arena of life.

It might have been for this reason that Paul was willing to give the messenger from Colossae a ready ear - -

"Tell me now, what's happening down there?"

...and so the messenger told him how the Christians were getting along quite well for the most part, but now they had to deal with this threat to their faith---there were these teachers of a strange doctrine; and men were losing their vital interest in the Christian faith. So Paul reacts.

Paul, in the first place, allows them to know that if it were possible, he would leave Rome at once and he'd go directly to the Christians in Colossae; and he would argue with these strange teachers...and he'd offer the necessary correctives. Paul can't go. There are these ever-present chains...there is the constant watchful eye of the jailor. So Paul does the next-best thing. He says...."I will pray for them...and I will also write them a letter."

This, too, is something we need to learn from this page in the life of the book of the Apostle Paul. When you can't go to someone, when your hands are tied, when there is a definite limitation to what you can actually do, you ought to pray. (Incidentally, the best thing that you can ever do for anyone is to pray for him, and sometimes it's the only thing.) So Paul began to pray

for these Christians whose faith was being threatened; and this letter that he wrote serves as a window into his soul, the kind of thing for which he prayed. He was willing to do this, mark you, because he could not separate himself from them. And he was willing to pray for them because as he prayed, so his own faith became stronger.

You know, don't you, that it's never possible to ask God for a blessing for somebody else without having God in some way smile directly upon you. The more you pray for other people, the more the grace of God becomes operative in your life. And who knows, perhaps Paul felt this a very necessary thing for him, because while he was in jail, human as he was, there was always the temptation to defect - - "Come on--let the secretary come! I will offer a confession.

I'm tired and weary of this whole business - - there's a limit to what a man can take - - "

...Paul might have reasoned - - and so he could have defected.

Why didn't he?

It could be that Paul did not defect because he happened to remember that the eyes of other Christians were on him. If he compromised, why, then, should these firm Christians in the faith, there in Colossae, threatened, try to battle it out any longer? If their leader should weaken, what encouragement would they have to remain firm? And as he prayed for them he remembered that they were depending upon him.

This, too, is a mighty important thing for us to remember: that in the plan of God, the estate of other people's souls becomes our responsibility. Whether you care to accept it or not, it is a fact of life that there are people in this world who have kept to the road just because they have seen you

keep to the road....that there are some people who have made a certain turn just because as they watched you, they saw how you took the turn in the road. This is one thing that a man can't deny - - that for good or for ill, the influence of other people's lives is still effective. And maybe, who knows, when the final story of your life and my life is being written, the final chapter could reveal, in one grand look at all of our years, the accumulation of one influence after another, consciously or subconsciously, on the part of other people upon us. You and I could well be the response to the thousand and one stimuli that come to us from other people. Paul, imprisoned in Rome, happened to remember that the eyes of other Christians were upon him...that the honor of Jesus Christ was at stake; and the basic continuation of these people in Colossae in the Christian faith could depend upon whether or not he defected.

I was with a large assembly of people at one time when the announcement was made that a certain man, imprisoned by the Communists, had been released. Because of our tremendous concern for the Christian faith, we had followed his absence from this country...

....there were some of us who had serious misgivings as

to what had happened in his mind and his attitude

...there were those of us who were given to believe that

he had defected--that he had compromised

...and when the announcement was made that he was being released, while there seemed to be apparently a mood of rejoicing on the part of many people, there were some of us who could not applaud. While we took our own souls to task, we were overcome suddenly with the grim realization that there were those who had suffered great injury because in his moment, perhaps, of weakness, he had defected.

It's not always written as largely as this in every chapter of life - - it's not always written so dramatically. But I've been a Pastor long enough to see what happens in the lives of teenagers when their parents have gone through a certain phase....and their parents had defected--defected the Kingdom of God - - made compromise with the Devil.

- - there are times when they returned...and they
would give everything that they had to make
amends

...but the scars remain on those who were watching them, who had hoped for more, who had a right to expect more. God has a way of expecting every single one of us to assume a measure of responsibility for the good or for the ill which others know because of the example of our lives. Thanks be to God for the Apostle Paul! Imprisoned as he was, he could not throw off the responsibility that he had for other Christians and he remained faithful, even unto death.

Well, he couldn't go to the Christians in Colossae, so he wrote them a letter. And what he wanted them to remember, despite their difficulty, was this: they ought to keep before them some true picture of the church. They were members of a Christian congregation....and as Paul prayed for them, we get some insight into what he understood by the real church.

For Paul, the real church, as you read these passages for yourself,

....was the company of believers who knew encouragement

....the company of believers who received the wisdom from God

....the company of believers who were knit together in the
bond of love

....the company of believers who having received Jesus Christ,
remained firm in the faith and lived in Him

In this very hurried fashion, let me remind you now of each one of these characteristics and traits.

For the Apostle Paul the true church was always to be a group of people who encouraged one another

...I should like to think that it's far easier for you and me to be Christians because we are inside the church. Every time you and I come to church we encourage somebody else to come. Make no mistake about it, the very fact that you are here is a witness to something, and this witness becomes a measure of encouragement.

Every now and then someone says to me in the New Member Group session:

"Pastor, I don't know what to do - - "

it's either "My husband - "

or

"My wife - " (whichever it might be)

"- - doesn't feel the same way that I do about

the church. Should I stay out or should I come in?"

...how can you possibly encourage anyone if you yourself delay, hesitate, have reservation? The church is always the company of those who are encouraging others.

...There's the other side of the matter. I earnestly pray for this congregation that we might establish in each other the degree of trust and responsibility that should you have a problem, you should be able to go to another member of the church and lay bare your soul..with trust and with confidence...and be able to receive from another member of the church the encouragement that you need to stay on the right road....

- - it's not possible for me to do it--I wish I could...I

think if I left this pulpit this morning and walked down this

aisle, I could spot every now and then, and I could look certain of you straight in the eye, and I could remember how, in the short time that I have been here, I've needed encouragement, for a particular philosophy of life, for a particular dream for this congregation that gripped my soul ...and I just needed someone to say: "Stick to it! The dream is right--we encourage it!"

....this is what we ought to mean to each other. We ought to find within the company of the church those who encourage us in a way that we cannot find it outside the church. It ought always to be easier for you to be good because you're in the company of those who encourage you to be good.

Paul also had this characteristic for the true church:

they were a people knit together in the bonds of love

...the true church should always see itself as a congregation, a group of people, where each person is an object of God's love. We ought to look upon ourselves as we want God to look upon us. This glorious salutation that you receive in the liturgy - - "Beloved in the Lord" - - - you know exactly what that means, don't you? It means that the person alongside of you, the person in front of you, the person behind you - - every other person here, including yourself, is an object of God's love!

...I'm convinced, the longer I love, that the thing we need more in this world than anything else is to be able to accept each other in love ...and I'm also convinced that it's one of the most difficult things--to accept someone in love that you don't like. Each of us has certain characteristics and traits that may irritate and annoy. Where did you

ever get the idea that there's anything about you that's really attractive to God? What is there about you, now, that God can really like? - - reprobate sinners that we are! --those to whom He has given so much....and we return so little

....the precious gift of life itself, and we squander it ...what is there, now, about us, that God can like? who knows? But this we do know: God loves us. And this is your hope and this is my hope. Unattractive sinner that I am, God's love remains constant.I've tucked away in my file for safe keeping and for future reference what I think was the first mimeographed notation that I sent this congregation the week after I became your Pastor. I had come to you as a stranger - - I don't think I could name ten people by name the first Sunday I was here...

and having come from a congregation where for almost eighteen years you had identified as a Pastor yourself so intimately with your people...names, middle names...telephone numbers...street addresses....number of children

...and suddenly I find myself, almost a total stranger, shaking your hand within the red doors. And I remember the frame of mind that God gave me. I kept saying to myself, after I shook each hand:

"Your name I may not know....your disposition, your characteristics, your traits are yet to be discovered - - but this I know right now: you are an object of God's love. God loves you! ..no more, no less, than the hand that I just shook - - ! "

What a transformation could come to any people of God if always they

could remind themselves that this must be a true characteristic of the true church - - where we're knit together in this bond of love - - each of us an object of God's love - - no one person more so than the other!

And then the Apostle Paul said that the true mark of the church must always be that it's made up of people who have received Jesus Christ, and people who stand firm in Jesus Christ.

....those of you who are here, having been members of the New Member Group sessions within the past years remember how we began each session, that is, the initial one for each group:

...we are here, not because we are concerning ourselves with this particular congregation

...we are here, not primarily because of our concern for a loyalty for the Lutheran church as a denomination

...but we have come together because of our concern for Jesus Christ.....

...and the Sunday when you formally become a member of this congregation your primary loyalty will not be to the Lutheran church as a denomination...the day you are received into the membership of this parish you are received because you are committing yourself for the first time to Jesus Christ....or you are re-committing yourself to Jesus Christ.....and that re-commitment finds its expression through your relationship with a particular congregation

...the mark of a true church is always to be found within when the people have their commitment vitally expressed to Jesus Christ.

....John Wesley was an ardent Protestant as you well know. He was the symbol of Protestantism for England at the time of his life. And one day he got word that a member of his family had decided to become a Roman Catholic. Ardent Protestant that he was, it disturbed him greatly, and yet he remembered that he was a follower of Jesus Christ, and he wrote a letter to the member of his family who had decided upon a different religious persuasion. This is what he wrote: "You can be damned in any church; you can be saved in any church; the thing that matters most is your vital relationship to Jesus Christ." This is the true characteristic of the true church - - where people are committed to Jesus Christ.

So Paul wrote to the Christians in Colossae.

They had divisions....they had strife....they had factions

And he said, "I pray for you the continuing awareness of the true characteristic of the true church - "

....now that's the way Paul wrote to a church that had some trouble on its hands.

We're fortunate in Saint Luke Church.

We have no division....we have no strife....we have no factions.

We are one family.

Ours is the optimum climate by which to achieve more and more the characteristics of the true church.

Into this glorious privilege I slip my hand once more into yours as together and as a people there shall be clearer evidence that the true church exists here....

and now....

among us.

"WHEN JESUS WAS BORN"

On this, the first Sunday in Advent, the sermon bears the title, "When Jesus Was Born"; and the text, the first two verses of the second chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew; the verses to which we shall return each Sunday during Advent:

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the King, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

For those of us who have heard it before, it still remains the most beautiful story that man has ever heard. It's not alone for its charm and its beauty, not alone for its reverence, but also for its wonder. There is the element of mystery about it, and yet the more one contemplates, the more there is made plain for him something of the eternal truth which God came to make known, as only the mystery of the Incarnation could unfold it.

"Now when Jesus was born - - " what do these words mean to you, these words of beauty and charm, of wonder and of reverence? Well, to begin with, it is God's moment in eternity when God Himself intervenes...

...when God acts directly

...when God becomes embodied in human flesh

...when God is unmistakably God

...and any man who is sensitive enough can recognize it.

I think I understand I understand why the story of Christmas remains unforgettable. I think I understand why it makes its rightful claim upon the human heart. For what happened in that Southeastern European village is akin to the

Christmas story.

The village had been bombed the night before--a heap of rubble and a heap of ruin. When dawn came the village priest was seen walking amid the rubble and the ruin, holding in his arms the newly-orphaned child...and as he went walking amid the evidence of death and destruction, the whimpering, the cooing, the crying of a child gave birth to hope and a new measure of courage

...for as long as the child is in the midst, a man has to concern himself with tomorrow...as long as the child is there a man has to go on living. We have a way of putting it here in Saint Luke Church whenever a child is baptized - - maybe you remember the words....the service of Baptism has been completed...all that remains now is the pronouncement of the Benediction...and are the parents go from the baptismal font, it's the Pastor who says to them words something like these:

"God smiles upon us in many ways.

God gives us any number of responsibilities.

But it can be said that God never smiles quite as

broadly upon us as when He places into our life

and into our love the soul of a child.

For as long as we live, we have no greater responsi-

bility than what we owe to the soul of this child."

...wherever there is a child in the midst, an adult has reason enough to go on living - - to go on living well.

I think I can understand why the Christmas story remains with its tug upon the human heart; for if you will permit me to put it this way:

- - the Christmas story is God Himself walking about in His world

...God Himself walking about in this wicked world

...God Himself walking about in this world where on every
hand there is the terrible evidence of sinfulness and
wickedness

...and yet God walks, confronting mankind with the
Baby in the midst.

Then it was that moment in eternity when God Himself became that Baby.

This is the meaning of Christmas - - when Jesus was born

- - when God became a Baby

▼ - when God took on human flesh

...but there are those who say, we will not believe it...we cannot accept it.

...for human flesh of this world can be sullied

...human flesh is a representation of sin

...God is too good for that

...God can't soil Himself

...God can't be stained by this world

...God just can't traffic with us sinners

...and so because they start saying and thinking what they believe God
can't do, God goes out doing it just the same.

...the fact of the Incarnation remains - - God in human flesh.

We do well to continue to marvel at the Virgin Birth. We do not traf-
fic with those who deny the Virgin Birth - - this Lutheran church requires any
man who would stand in this place to accept the doctrine of the Virgin Birth...
this church requires anyone who would become a member of this denomination to
give assent to the fact of the Virgin Birth

...and every Sunday when we come to-
gether we remind ourselves that we accept it, for in the declaration of the

Creed we declare the timeless truth "born of the Virgin Mary - - "

We do well to marvel that God Himself could be born of human flesh - - born of the Virgin pure

...but I also say to you, we do well to marvel at the birth of
any child, for the birth of any child is a bit of two people
plus God...and whenever and wherever God is a part of any-
thing, the element of the miraculous is present...for it's
the nature and the character of God to deal with the miracu-
lous

So I say to you, the aged priest walking about amid the ruin and the rubble,
holding in his arms the tiny babe, is in degree the image of God confronting
mankind in this world, so near to destruction, with the image of a Child, the
reminder of that moment in history when Jesus was born.

Let me tell you several things that ought to come to one's mind when
he reads these introductory words of the most beautiful chapter in Matthew's
Gospel--the most beautiful story known to those who have heard it before.
"When Jesus was born - - "

Ah, I know what this means - - it means this is the moment in
eternity when God Himself invades earth--directly. We talk so
much in this day about man's invasion of outer space - -
the great miracle happened centuries ago, when from Heaven
above there came the invasion to earth--when God came directly,
personally, into this world of ours

"When Jesus was born - - "

Ah, yes - - this is the moment in eternity when God Himself comes!
You know, of course you do, that up to this moment God had to work

through laws..

God had to work through prophets...

God had to work through other agents, through other people

"When Jesus was born in Bethlehem - - "

Ah, that isn't the moment that declares that God loves us more than that He had loved us at any other time...nay, not so! God is love and God's love remains constant from all eternity, but God's love manifests itself in different ways at different times...and God has always been taking the initiative and God has always been making the overture...

..in the days of Moses He came in the Ten Commandments

"Here...this is God...this is the Law...this is My way
...walk in it!"

...but men did not respond to the overture of God..

..so God sends the prophets, the priests and the kings

...and they in turn are not appreciated.

And God, His love constantly so great, from Heaven above says - -

"I have only one thing left - - - "

(even as the prophet Ezekiel foretold it, there must come that moment in eternity when God says - -)

"I will go myself! I shall not rely upon anyone else. There must come this moment in eternity when man, sensitive enough, having seen Me, can put his finger to his lips and with reverence unmistakably declare Me God."

So "When Jesus was born - - "

This is God come in human flesh....God Himself, directly and personally. My heart bleeds for any man whose God is not big

enough to be little enough to be clothed in human flesh.
It takes the biggest God possible to come in the form of a
child

"When Jesus was born - - "

...I say to myself, this means God coming in Christ - -
directly....personally

"When Jesus was born - - "

...I say to myself, this means God getting involved with
this world!

There are those who maintain that God is - yes, they
wouldn't question that their God is high and God is
lifted up and God is so great that He's so far removed
from His world that He'll have nothing to do with His
world. When I was a student in college they used to
tell us about the notion that some people had of God
as the Great Watchmaker, who designs the world, gets it
in motion - -

and like the watchmaker, puts all the parts
together, winds it, gets it started...and
as the watchmaker puts the watch upon the
shelf--walks away and goes to something
else and is no longer concerned--no longer
interested in the watch that he had made...

...so there are those who said - - so there are those who
today maintain! that this God who is up there is a God who
having once created a world, no longer has any interest in
it whatsoever! It must run of its own accord.

But when I read in this most beautiful story known to man, when I read here in Matthew's Gospel - -

"When Jesus was born - - "

..I say to myself, it is not true! God does become involved.

God does identify Himself with this world. And I, for one, would not want to go on living another day if this notion were robbed from my heart - - to believe that God Himself.... directly....gets involved in this world

- - one of the most precious truths that can claim the hearts and minds of any of us.

It's the Russian novelist, you know, who has done an excellent thing in one of his works, who pictures the devout Russian peasant, going to the cathedral...praying before an icon..."Reveal Thy face to me, O God, reveal Thy face to me; even as you came in Jesus Christ, let me see Your face - - " ...and as he prays there comes and there stands alongside of him the Stranger of Galilee--a face like every other man, yet not quite like every other man.....and as he goes on praying, he has nothing but the parade of faces in front of his mind's eye, the faces of all people, countless numbers of people....and as there stands alongside of him the Stranger from Galilee, His face is like these, yet something unlike....

(that's why some of us say all babies look alike - - all babies look alike because in the face of any human being the traits and characteristics of all of us are found)

....."Reveal Thy face to me, O God - - " ...the peasant prayed, and

when God revealed His face to him His face loomed largely upon the face of every human being he had ever known.

What does that mean, I say to you, except this:

...that God Himself gets involved in all of us

...God Himself gets involved in the issues of life that you and I have to face

What is the meaning of Christmas if it isn't this:

...God comes into this world, and God says,

"You can't keep Me out!"

I say to you this morning with all the ardor of my soul, every issue that confronts us in this, our day and age, whatever issue it may be, where people are involved, Jesus Christ is also involved, Jesus Christ is also there. If the Incarnation means anything at all it means that when Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, God came into this world, involved as He had never, so it seemed, been involved before. When I read these words - -

"When Jesus was born - - "

I say to myself, Ah, I begin to understand it now!

It's not only the moment in history when God Himself comes....

it's not only the moment in history when God proves unmistakably clear that He's going to become involved in the issues of this world

.....it's also an indication that God wants to be a stranger no longer - -

I don't know what I would do if God would remain to me a stranger...

I don't know what I would do if I had never seen the

face of Jesus Christ on whose face I could read the
lines of love.....

I don't know what I would do if I had never been able
to read the New Testament, where I have been
introduced to Jesus Christ, and to read the
words of Him born of the Virgin Mary who said - -

"He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father".....

I don't know what I would do if I had to be like some
people - - worship an unknown God - - worship a
strange God.....

Christmas means this to me.....

God saying - - "I don't want to be a stranger to you.

I want you to know me - - "

...and in order to do that, He had to stoop to my level.

..that's why God was born as Jesus Christ.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"IN BETHLEHEM - IN HEROD'S DAY"

Again, each Sunday during Advent, we shall return to the same passage of Scripture, the first two verses of the second chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

Today's sermon bears the title, "In Bethlehem - In Herod's Day".

The Christmas story is essentially a story of charm, of beauty, of reverence and of power. Inclined as you may be to find subtitles for it, let me suggest one subtitle that you can never use: "It Can't Happen Here"...is a subtitle that does not belong to the Christmas story. For if the Christmas story means anything, it does mean that it did happen, and that God at a particular moment in eternity identified Himself with this world. He Himself personally came and got involved with us. Why, we can even name places, we can name people, and we can put our finger on the map and say "Here! - - this was the place"!

....of all the subtitles that you might have for the Christmas story, don't ever succumb to the temptation to use "It Can't Happen Here".

It's just because it did happen, and it's just because Christmas is a fact, that at this time of the year in particular we go back remembering, and the Christmas season is, after it's all said and done, memory time, for there are exceedingly precious memories always a-stirring at Christmas-time.

One doesn't necessarily have to be religiously oriented to have nostalgia at Christmas-time. For Christmas has so become a part of the culture of Western

man that almost any person finds his heart strangely warmed as he remembers at Christmas...

...there were those war years - - the first time that you would

be separated, perchance, from your loved one

...there was that time when she went off to the college campus,

the young adult, and how diligently she sweated out the

latter part of September, the entire month of October---all

through the Thanksgiving recess she stayed on the college

campus....but week by week, counting the days until Christmas

came and she would be home for Christmas

...and home never meant quite as much to her as it did that

Christmas

Christmas is always the stirring of memories....

....the first time you attended a Christmas candlelight service

....or perchance, as a child you walked in the procession and

carried one of the figures for the creche

....that Christmas when you got the unexpected gift - - that

Christmas when you were remembered by someone you were

sure would forget

Christmas is memory time.

That's why we go back to remind ourselves that it's fact. It did happen.

Now when we remind ourselves that it did happen once upon a time, we realize that Christmas has no meaning for us whatsoever, this birth of Jesus Christ, unless we see it in its historical perspective. There was that moment in eternity when this thing, this wonderful thing, happened here. That's why the sermon bears the title "In Bethlehem - In Herod's Day"....it's a fact.

Now if we are to appreciate the true meaning of Christmas and see it in its historical perspective - -

what were times like when Herod was king?

what kind of man was this king?

what was the mood and temper of

"O little town of Bethlehem,

how still we see thee lie" - - ?

Well, let me tell you first of all about Herod.

He is often referred to as Herod the Great. And immediately I must say to you, contrary to any other notion that you might have, he was an outstanding king. And he was a great king. He had done much for his kingdom. He was trusted by the Romans who put him in power, and there was a time in his life when he was respected by the Jews--I could even say he was loved by them. For it's a matter of historical record that when the famine of 25 B.C. came, it was Herod as King who melted his own gold plate in order to get funds by which to purchase corn to feed the hungry of his people. He established rule, he guaranteed peace and brought order to disorder. This was Herod the Great.

But something happened to Herod. The latter part of his life was not nearly as wonderful as his early years...

...and this is the terrible truth by which any young man must be confronted: no matter how rich in promise his early days may be, there is always the possibility of defect - - one could default as he becomes older...and older men have been known to change their character...

so it was with Herod; for the world remembers him only as a matter of history as being great....by and large, we refer to him as the wicked king. And as he became older, he became insanely jealous and insanely suspicious. He thought

that any man that he met who had any kind of promise himself was after his throne, and he viewed everyone with so great suspicion. Do you want to hear the record? - -

- - suspicious of his own wife, he had her murdered
- - suspicious of her mother, he had her murdered
- - his first-born son, suspicious of him, he had him murdered
- - three of his other sons, likewise he had them put to death
- - if anyone seemed to be any kind of threat at all, in the fancy of his imagination, so he had him liquidated

He became so wicked that the most despicable of all his deeds came in his last years - - namely the slaughter of the Innocents, in which he had every child under two years of age put to death, hoping to find the promised King of the Jews in that group...

...now let me tell you the worst of all things - -

...he knew that he was being hated by his people in his last years and he knew that when the time came for him to die that nobody would cry. Vain, insanely jealous and suspicious, he said - - "There must be weeping when I die."
...and so he issued one of the strangest orders in history. By pre-arrangement, certain of his officials were in duty bound to carry out this order - - that at the moment that Herod died, the most respected and trusted leaders in Jerusalem were to be put to death. "For," reasoned he, "if they don't cry when I die, let them weep at the death of their

leaders--men whom they did love."so Herod planned it that
way - - - "When I die, let people cry."

It was at a time such as this, when a mad-man was loose in the palace, that God
saw fit to risk the world, that God saw fit to risk Himself, with a tiny Babe...
It was in Herod's day that this thing happened....
It was in Bethlehem that Jesus was born.

Bethlehem?

The name means House of Bread. It's a little village located there, amphi-the-
ster-like, between the range of two hills. Ah, the valley is green in Bethlehem,
and the hills are fertile, and the people of Bethlehem had bread--they had enough
to eat. And as far as the misery and the hunger of the rest of the world, they
couldn't care less. To a people such as that, and when a man as wicked as Herod
was on the throne, God saw fit to make the great invasion.....

God saw fit to make the great advent

God saw fit to risk Himself in the form of a peasant-
maiden-born Redeemer....the Baby Christ

You must see the story of Christmas as the fact of Christmas.
It happened at a particular time and it happened in this world.

We make a mistake, my friend, when we talk about the Christmas Story, and
I'm not so sure that I've done the best thing in taking as the general theme for
this series of four sermons "The Christmas Story"...for when you talk about the
Christmas Story you are inclined to think of something fanciful--something that
is characteristically a story-told thing. And you might reach the place some-
time where you will forget that it actually happened. So again and again when
we remember Christmas we say to ourselves...

...it was in Bethlehem

...it was in Herod's day

...you can point to the place on the map, and you can
go back to the calendars of time, and you can say
this was the place...this was the year

Now what does this all mean to you and to me? It simply means that once upon a time, at an actual moment, God saw fit to visit this world....God saw fit to identify Himself with us....God saw fit to become involved.

Now in the day of Jesus Christ there were those to whom this truth came with a tremendous impact. And the more they thought about it, the more their own lives were transformed...for they kept saying to themselves

"Think of it! God came to us in Jesus Christ!

I met Him! I knew Him! He entered my heart!"

...and they could never again be the same.

It was a fact.

And these men became transformed, because they knew that God had come into their lives.

The transformed men changed the character of the world, and the world has never been the same! - - since that moment in eternity when this became the visited planet.

When I was in England, the school mistress would point with pride to the picture of the Queen, not simply to say we have respect for our monarch, but she would say with much enthusiasm, "The Queen came the day our school was dedicated - - the Queen paid us a visit!"I would go to a hall, a government place, and the man in charge would say, "We have never quite forgotten when King George came to visit us here. We like to think that even the character of these walls became transformed!" - - so great was the joy they had in their hearts, to think that the King came to them, that their monarch graced their place with his visit.

I don't know how much you may despair of this world

I don't know how often you may be inclined to deplore the wickedness
which is this world.....

but, beloved, I must tell you this - -

this is the world that God happened to visit!

we are the visited planet!

God did come to us!

That's why we can't have done with this world.

That's why you and I can't evade a measure of responsibility for it.

God has left His stamp....God says, "It belongs to Me"

...and we are in duty bound, then, to treat it as a world for whom
God has concern.

I don't know how you are inclined to look at other people

I don't know how often you may deplore the fact that other people
may not be to your liking.....

but I would remind you of this, my friend - -

that God saw fit to come into this world and to
confront people with the Person of Jesus Christ,

and to say to people that you and I meet - - "I

want to visit you - - I want to come into your heart!"

I don't know with what regard you hold the people who sit in the same
place where you now sit - - the person in front, behind, or
alongside of you - -

but I would remind you that any one of us is one that God
has seen fit to visit

....a Christian is one who has been visited by Jesus Christ.

There's a precious old story told about Zaccheas, who went back night after night to the old sycamore tree, because he never wanted himself to forget that at a particular time and at a certain place, Jesus Christ came into his heart....

....fortunate indeed is any person who might be able to name places, name faces, and remember with much joy a particular moment when it happened, when he knew without the shadow of a doubt that God had paid him a visit.

In the hill country of every man's soul there is a place called Bethlehem

....and each of us could have his moment in eternity when

unmistakably we are made aware of this visit which is God

...and this, beloved, is the meaning of Christmas - -

the fact which is more than the story.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WISE MEN FROM THE EAST"

Today's sermon, bearing the title, "Wise Men From The East", is the next-to-the-last in the Advent series based upon the general theme, The Christmas Story. The text is the same as the preceding two Sundays, Matthew, second chapter, verses 1 and 2:

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

When I was a lad it seemed to me that I could understand all parts of the Christmas story except one. The one thing that I couldn't quite appreciate or comprehend was the attitude of the inn-keeper. For you see, in my childhood reaction I said, had I been there, I would have given Him the very best that I had - - how could I have been unresponsive to the need of Mary, to the need of Joseph?.....so I reasoned as a child, as a lad.

But the older I become, strangely enough, it's the attitude of the inn-keeper that's the only thing in the Christmas story that I think that I can understand. For human nature has a way of allowing itself to become indifferent to the needs of other people. They can rationalize quickly, they can find any number of excuses why they ought not to go out of their way to do anything nice, and should I say, even anything necessary, for someone else.

I come this morning to this sacred desk, to sing the praise of the wise men - - "patron saints", if you please, of all those who respond to God, of all those who are sensitive enough to feel that God is near. I ask myself the

question: who were these wise men?

from what part of the country did they come?

why did they continue in their journey?

Ah, legend gives us many answers, many beautiful and interesting tales.

Legend even gave them names, legend even says that they were three - - legend could even name the country from which they came. As far as the Bible is concerned, the Bible gives us only one simple, unadulterated fact...

- - they were men who looked for a sign from God,

and when they saw the sign, they responded,

and they kept following the direction that

they got from God - -

We know nothing about their astrology...

In fact, we know nothing about them whatsoever, except the fact that they got a sign from God, and they kept following until they arrived - - arrived at the place which was at the end of a wandering Star.

Now this I must tell you: that beyond a shadow of a doubt, there were any number of other people who also saw the Star. Surely a Star as brilliant, as wonderful as that must have been, must have been seen by many, yes, countless numbers of people. But the record has it that only the wise men saw it and kept following until they arrived at the end of the way of a wandering Star.

Why didn't others follow what they saw? The answer is simple: not everyone will allow himself to be sensitive to God's leading...not everyone can look up and say, unmistakably, "This is God!" - - he may hope for something like this, albeit he may need some sign...but when it appears, and when God gives some indication of His willingness to guide and direct us, the tragedy of life is this - - that not everyone will respond, not everyone will follow. God may point the way,

and we may remain indifferent or evasive. I am absolutely intrigued by the fact that there were those in that day, who, when God gave them a sign, said "This is it!" Christina Rossetti in her lovely poem of the Christmas story, (in fact, we'll sing it as our last hymn in the service today) brings all of us into the picture when she raises the question: "What can I give Him, poor as I am? if I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb; if I were a wise man, I would do my part - - "

ah, but that's poetry, and Christina Rossetti needed
a word that would rhyme with the last word in her
poem which is "heart"....

- - but I ask you the question: had you lived then and there, would you have been a wise man who would have done his part? would you, having seen the Star, kept following, following, despite discouragement and disappointment, until you would have arrived? Ah, the three kings, these wise men, are the patron saints of all those who look to God for some sign, and then when it appears, keep following until they arrive.

Now what was it that kept them on the way?...night after night...

...week after week

...month after month

...yes, and year after year

...and one disappointment after another, because
life was just as real then as it is now

- - what kept them following until they eventually arrived?

....all others are forgotten...they are remembered alone because they kept to the way.

Let me suggest for you three possible answers.

I think, in the first place, when they saw the sign, they read in the

sign of the Star that here was the finest and the highest that was beckoning them on. Nothing that they had ever experienced in life was quite like this, and they were willing to respond to the highest and the finest.

...not let me put it for you again - - the tragedy is life for any number of people is this: their willingness to settle down too easily for the second best, not the highest....

These wise men from the East would not be content until they could keep following, until they experienced the highest and best.

It's a poor parable, I grant you; but I had heard so much of the charm of San Francisco - - no other city in this United States is quite like it.... and one doesn't have to be a Californian to think it! - -

...and when I went there again, I said, now I must satisfy the ambition of my youth; for someone had told me about the vista to be seen from the Top of the Mark - -
- nothing quite like it!

...and so I went to the Mark Hopkins Hotel and just as I was about to enter, a stranger stopped me and he said - - "But the view is much better across the way, in the newer hotel! It seems to have a finer vantage-point, and you'll be more thrilled with the view that you'll see from the Clairemont - -"

....I gave him no attention. I had set my sight for what I would see from the Top of the Mark!

I'm not here debating as to whether it is better across the street or not... I am simply saying that I was willing to settle for a goal that I had established for myself, and beyond that goal I had no other interest. This, too, I say to you, is the tragedy in life - - that all too often we have no greater

interest in anything finer or better that could be had. These wise men from the East had seen something in the Star that beckoned them on to the finest and the highest that they felt that life could give, and would not settle for anything less.

As I think of America getting older and older, I also think of the sad state of many people who reach the sunset years of life and who permit themselves to think that they have already seen the finest and the best - - who do nothing but live in the past, as though all the good that God was about to give to them they had already received. This, I say to you, is not so. Who is the man who says - - "Grow old along with me, the best is yet to be - - "happy indeed are they who stay to the road, always believing that God's better gift is yet to come, and will not stop at any point, but keep on the way. I sing the praise of the wise men, who having seen the Star, said, This is a sign of God's highest and best, and we will not be content - - we will keep on the road.

I think there's a second reason why they kept to the road.

They honestly believed that there was a wisdom, the like of which this world could not give, that would be found if they kept on their search. This world needs the wisdom that is not to be found among us. The Star that shone upon all men was the Star of the fact that God's wisdom could be made available to mankind. Wisdom is a priceless gift, and maybe next to love, it's the thing that we lack most. More than one person has done the kind of thing that I'm about to share with you now - - a kind of projection into the mind of the man from Mars who had come to this earth - - we were visited by him...

....and the Martian made his observation, and then he went back

to report on the Earthians - - what he thought of us - -

...and this could have been his report:

"It's incredible! Why, I've never seen anything like it!

"Once every 20,25 years those people down there on Earth are inclined to blow themselves to bits! They build wonderful and glorious cities - - they take pride in their civilization....and then every two decades or so they try to destroy it! They lack something.....why it's incredible!...they have more schools, they say they have finer schools than they've ever had before, but they lack certain degrees of intelligence - - it's incredible! "

- - says this man who reports to the Martians
"They spend all kinds of money on pleasure, on luxuries, on the things that make for security in this world, and give so little time to the concern for the things that are not found in brick and mortar - - it's incredible!"

- - says this man who makes his report to the
Martians...

"Why, a crooner can make more money - - many, many times more money, than even the President of that great country known as the United States of America - - "

- - so the Martian goes on with his report to his people, and he could also add....

"They can set a satellite in outer space, and they can get some word from Telestar to all the people on Earth - - they know how to talk that way - - ! "

(and I'm not being sarcastic - I love you too
much for this)

"....and mind you, there are some people down there on

Earth who when they go to church, they don't even know how to say hello to the person who sits alongside of them!

"It's incredible! - - because people down there on Earth, they think that they want to send a man to the Moon, but they don't even know the way to the house of the man who lives next door!

What do they lack? They lack wisdom! wisdom by which to understand the need for these things.....and they lack the motivation of love by which to realize it."

...the wise men from the East, not having so much as a fourth-grade education, perhaps, as we contrast them with us, were sensitive enough to know that this world needs the wisdom which is God's.

We sing the praise of the wise men who, having seen the sign in the heavens, said, "This is God beckoning us on to something of which we ourselves are not capable....if we keep looking, in His name, perchance we'll find it!"

I sing the praise of the wise men because they kept on the way, believing that if they continued to the end of the journey, there they might be confronted by the fact of God in the way they had never been confronted by God before. This, honestly now, is the deep hunger of the human heart - - to know what God is like...

...and as they wandered, following the Star, then they came to Bethlehem, and only at Bethlehem did they fall upon their knees - - only then were they constrained to worship, for there they beheld the face of God, ...and this is the deep-seated need of the human soul - - to know what God is like - - to be able to read upon His face the lines of love.

Dorothy Sayers, one of England's finest playwrights, who has preached many a sermon in what she has written, has an interesting play called "Kings In Judaea"; and in that play she has one of these three wise men ask a question. Let me read the question for you. Says this wise man, speaking his part,

"I speak for the sorrowful people. We rise up to labor
and lie down to sleep, and night is only a pause between
one burden and another. Fear is our daily companion - -
fear of want, of war, of cruel death - - and even more - -
of cruel life. But all this we could bear if we knew we
did not suffer in vain - - that God was with us in the
struggle - sharing the misery of His own world - - "

And that's exactly what these wise men found when they came to Bethlehem and
looked at the face of Jesus Christ - -

"This is God!

God come into the world!

God taking His place with us!"

It's a precious little story that's told about a girl who went to bed
one night, and startled by the dark when she was awakened, she called out for
her mother; and the mother said, "But you know you don't have to be afraid.
God is everywhere, God is here." ...and in childish innocence she replied, "But
if only I could see His face - if only I could see His face in the dark!"

Wise men, following the Star, came to a darkened manger in Bethlehem,
and as never before the face of God was beheld....

...and anyone who follows God's leading has never, never been dis-
appointed in what he has seen in the face of Jesus Christ....

.....and this is the most wonderful of all the aspects
of the Christmas story.

* * *

"TO WORSHIP HIM"

Today's sermon, entitled, "To Worship Him", is the last in the series for Advent based on Matthew, the second chapter, the first twelve verses. Let me read for you now the first, second and the eleventh verses of the second chapter:

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. "

..." and the wise men said, "Where is he that is born king of the

Jews? for we have come to worship him - - "

There's something of the wind, the sand and the stars in those words!

You do not read them aright if you simply think that you're dealing with some romantic tale of never-never land. These people actually lived. And when you think of the three men, as legend would have it, who followed the star until they came to Bethlehem, you're talking about men, real-life characters, who week by week and month by month and year after year knew discouragement and disappointment.....but disillusionment, never.

"If we had known the desert and the night
would be so desolate,
The wind so chill,
Perhaps we never would have left the site of home
And crossed the first dark shadowed hill - - "

....so they must have reasoned to themselves. But they are the ones who kept to the road, wandering, following the Star, until they should arrive.

As we contemplate the message of the wise men, they tell us at least three different things on this Sunday nearest to Christmas.

The first thing is that not all men come to Jesus Christ in the same way. Some men come to God quickly, suddenly, unexpectedly....

...the thief on the cross - - but a moment or two away from death - - in one sublime moment, suddenly, is confronted by the fact of God in Jesus Christ....and there just around the corner is death, and before that step is taken he is confronted by God in Jesus Christ....

...not all men come to God in the same way.

Some come very suddenly - almost unexpectedly....

...there is the story of the arctic explorer who had given his life to the dream that claimed him. Lost in the barren wilderness...as though it were a dream, he beheld the face of Jesus Christ against the snow. He had never had much to do with God before. Why should this come to him now? This I cannot tell you. Miraculously, he was rescued. He returned to his native land - - to give 33 years of his life to the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ - - the Christ who came to him suddenly, unexpectedly, miraculously....

...not all men come to God in the same way.

But the wise men stand as an eternal symbol of those who are fortunate enough to see a sign. Somewhere along the way they see this sign, and they call it God, and they keep following until at journey's end they see Him face to face and recognize Him as He is. Fortunate indeed is any man who has time to get ready for the face of God....

...much of the thrill that comes with the planning of any journey is not so much the accomplishment of the trip,

but it's the anticipation, the looking ahead....and sometimes, almost cynically so, we are inclined to think that we get more out of the anticipation than the realization of the trip, the final completion itself.

...fortunate indeed is any man who is given time to get ready - - who has weeks and months and years to prepare for that sublime moment when he faces God in reality. Then he can appreciate Him to the full.

The wise men received prior warning. They had a sign. And as they followed the Star, every day's journey was a preparation for the great moment when they would kneel before the manger-born King.

...incidentally, this is part of the teaching of the church, isn't it....even in the liturgy...for Sunday after Sunday when you come to worship in this place, what is part of the Declaration of Grace that comes to you except the offer of God's forgiveness - "even unto life everlasting" ...and make no mistake about it, those of us who have come to claim the love of Jesus Christ, those of us who are claimed by God's love in Christ, should look upon each day as another step in the journey toward life everlasting.

I remain, I hope as long as God gives me memory, appreciative of that woman whom I met in the first year of my ministry. When I went to call upon her she must have been in her middle 80's....and in the course of the conversation she said - - "And do you know what I'm living for, Pastor? I'm living out these remaining years of my life in rich expectancy that when I breathe my last I shall see my Saviour face to face."

One really ought not to wait until he becomes an octogenarian to talk like that!

At any stage in the journey, whatever our years may be, there ought always be kept before us the prospect of some day, somewhere, somehow, seeing God face to face....

....not all men come into God's presence the same way.

Some are ushered in suddenly - - without a moment of preparation.

The wise men remain as the eternal symbol of those who are able to make the most of their moment before God because each step of their journey was a preparation, a getting ready.

Not all men come to God, is lesson #2 from the witness of the wise men, for the same reason. There are some men who hear about God, and when they come to Him they come out of curiosity.....

....what is God like?

....is He a Judge?

....is He a Ruler of the Universe?

....is He a Great Spirit?

....is He a Faceless One...or does He have a face?

....what is His basic character and nature?

...there are those who look for God because they want to know what He is like - - driven, compelled by curiosity.

...not all men come to God for the same reason.

Some of them are driven to Him out of a sense of need....

...they've been told that He is one who can supply all that man may require, and so they come to Him, asking for something...they've been told that He is able to supply their needs.

...the cartoonist preaches a far more effective sermon than you may realize when he even has a character,

Dennis, when he says his prayers, asking for a pair of skates, because, he says, "Somehow I get Him confused with Santa Claus."

...there are people who when they come to God, come to Him in much the same way as they come to a Santa Claus - - one who asks no questions but out of his supply, reaches somewhere on a shelf and gives....

....so there are people who come to God...

There are some men who when they come to God, come so completely overwhelmed by the fact of God that all that they can do is wonder and stand in awe.

There are others who when they come to God, even as the wise men, say,

"We have come to worship"

...and no man has ever really been ushered into the presence of God until he can say "I have come to worship Him" - - not to ask...not to beg....not to look....

...but fall upon our knees in wonder,

in amazement,

in awe....which is worship.

As the wise men journeyed month after month, year after year, they were driven by one overwhelming thought - - when we see Him we shall fall upon our knees and we shall worship and adore him.

Now I must tell you this in the third place....

that while it is true that not all men come to God in the same way..

while it is also true that not all men come to God for the same

reason - -

- - should they, however, come to worship, not all worship in the same way.

The older some of us become the more tolerant we become. We are inclined to say that we are grateful for any man who turns his face toward God. We shan't argue about the influences on his life and we shan't much concern ourselves with what it is that prompts him to look in God's direction. We'll simply be grateful enough for the fact that he should look toward God.....so tolerant have we become.

But I say to you now with all the ardor of my soul...it is never enough simply to turn toward God, as though the turning in itself were a final and a complete act of worship. While there may be men who will turn toward God as an act of worship, not all worship Him in the same way. ...the wise men remain as the eternal symbol of those who when they turn to God, worship Him and worship Him in the best possible way...for when they worship Him they fall upon their knees and offer Him the homage of their hearts. This is the best possible way by which to be ushered into the presence of God - - to fall upon one's knees...

...if you go to Copenhagen, you'll want to see a number of lovely things in that charming city of the northland. You'll be fortunate indeed if in your journey you'll find your way to the Church of Our Lady in Copenhagen. It's to be remembered for several things. One, because it's the church which has some of Thorwaldsen's finest works; in the niches of the walls of the church, much like the recesses of the windows, you'll find life-sized statues of the apostles.....but his crowning work is the Christus above the altar - - there He is, waiting for the worshipper with outstretched arms.but it was the guide

in the Church of Our Lady who said to me in broken English - - "You can see His face better if you get on your knees."

...to be ushered into the presence of God and to see Him as He is, one must get on his knees.

....and of course you know, don't you, that if you were to travel to Bethlehem and you would want to visit the Church of the Holy Nativity, built, presumably, upon the site of either the cave or the stable where Christ was born, you cannot enter walking erectly. For certain understandable reasons, they've lowered the entrance into the Church of the Holy Nativity, and no one, as an adult at least, enters without the lowered head, in bowed fashion..

...all men may turn to God at some time or another

...all men may be inclined to give Him some act of worship

...but you never worship correctly,

you never worship properly,

unless in the tradition of the wise men you come and kneel.

And what does kneeling indicate? Kneeling, if it doesn't indicate anything else, it indicates this submission, in humility, man comes into the presence of God.

For shame upon our generation! We, perhaps more than any other generation, have fraternized too much with God. We have not done the right thing when we talk about Him as the "Man Upstairs" - "He" - "The Big Brother"..... no man should ever allow himself to make of God an equal. When you come into the presence of God you are constrained to kneel. So the wise men did. And they worshipped properly.

...in many of the wonderful things that they tell about

Lord Nelson, the historian recites how he was inclined

to deal rather graciously and courteously with those whom he conquered. And once there was brought to Lord Nelson's flagship, to the quarterdeck, the admiral of the opposing fleet whom the British had overwhelmed. The admiral of the opposing fleet had heard something of Lord Nelson's charity and graciousness and as though to trade upon it he walked with hand outstretched....and Nelson remained with his hand by his side and simply said, "Your sword first, and then your hand."

...when you come to worship God you submit, you kneel...and then God says, "Arise, my child. I will give you my hand and I will walk with you." No man worships correctly, no man worships perfectly, until he first knows what it is to kneel.

And then I would also suggest that you keep in mind that the act of worship is never perfect, never complete, until you have offered God the best that you have. Gold and Frankincense and Myrrh were the priceless gifts of these men - - they were gifts fit for a king. If we have failed to make the most of our worship experience of Jesus Christ, it could be that we have never known what it is to offer Him our best. The school teacher was not right when she said to her boys and girls when they were getting ready for the white gift service - - "Wouldn't you find something at home, something that you perhaps don't need, that you could bring?" ...and maybe the little boy was nearer the point, and hit it quite close enough - - "But Teacher, we're so poor that we don't have anything that we don't need." ...the act of worship in God's presence is complete when we take, not out of our luxuries, but out of our needs, and give to Him.

There were those who say that their most unforgettable Christmas was the Christmas when they opened their gifts and then the mother said to each of her

three sons - - "Now the gifts have all been opened. Which one do you like best?"
...and each one chose the gift that he liked best. And then she said, and ~~an~~ don't
you dare sit in judgment upon her and call her hardhearted--that's the last thing
that you could ever say of her! ...and then she said - "You take this gift that
you like best and then give it to someone who doesn't have anything near like it."
Our worship of God is complete only when we offer Him the best that we have.

There are certain things that I would ask of God the older I become; and
one of them is this: that if it be pleasing in His sight, I would like long years
- - opportunity by which to love and to serve and to give freely of whatever God
has given to me....that when I come to journey's end I might be able to say with
great joy in my heart, whatever He exacted from me, whatever I offered to Him, it
was worth it!

"If we had known the desert and the night
would be so desolate,
The wind so chill,
Perhaps we never would have left the site of home
And crossed the first dark shadowed hill.
But O the Star, the Star with its white burning
That drew us ever onward with sweet strange powers
So that there was no returning,
Till we laid our gift before His feet.
Now we are old.
The days go quietly. Yet sometimes I see it all again.
How little does it matter now
That we knew cold and heat and weariness and pain.
Because at last the joy, heart warm and wild
We came to Bethlehem and found the Child."

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE JOY WHICH IS CHRISTMAS"

" - - behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy,
which shall be to all people.
For unto you is born this day in the city of David
a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10,11)

The artist, be he painter, carver of wood, stone or metal, has done much with the face of Christ. He is the Christ of the angry face, even as He drove the money-changers from the Temple. He is the Christ of the outstretched arms, whose face, lined with tenderness, welcomed children to His knee. He is the Christ of determination, even as "He set His face steadfastly toward Jerusalem." He is the Christ with tears in His eyes as "beholding the city He wept over it." He is the Christ of magnetism, who when He saw fishermen with their nets, said "Follow Me, and they left all and went after Him." But never have I known an artist to be bold enough to picture Him laughing. Did He not have His hilarious moments? or do we think that the burden of our sin weighed always too heavily upon His heart for any moment of gaiety?

Yet as a child I thought I heard Him laugh, as I pictured Him running so freely toward the hilltop, calling to His friends Sarah and Isaac.

Perchance we hesitate to think of Him in terms of joy because when we reflect upon life in all seriousness we are impressed only by what is miserable and depressive.

In not so far away Fredericksburg, Virginia, in the Civil War days, a decisive battle was fought. The Union Army was being defeated. A reporter on the scene telegraphed his editor in New York and was the first to give the news. The editor, zealous for his paper's reputation, instructed the reporter not to give up the wire to anyone else. "But," remonstrated the reporter, "I have given you all the news. This is all there is to be said!" Replied the

editor, "Do not give up the wire. Keep reporting - - report anything - - for all I care, send us the book of Job!" And hour after hour the reporter read into the wire the account of misery and catastrophe which is the human scene a la Job.

Who can say but what this remains as the situation today? From many of the wires from all parts of the world the story is the same, tragedy upon tragedy, misery upon misery.

Yet when God saw fit to break the news to us it was the welcome word of joy. Maybe that is the way it is. Whatever joy we experience in life is something that comes to us out of this world. Maybe God and God alone can give us cause for rejoicing.

Isn't it true that we never have joy in our hearts save when something good either comes to us or through us? Is it possible for any of us to create joy of and by ourselves alone?

What is the joy that God brings?

The joy that God brings is the Good News of salvation - - salvation which is effective in the here and the now.

Ah, there you have it! The messenger of God said it would happen today. This is the Good News of Christmas, the bright and happy news that God acts in the present moment. For always prior to the coming of Christ men thought of God as One who had acted in the past. He was the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob. Or on the other hand when they thought of God, they thought in terms of One who would act in the distant future. Christmas is the story of God in the present tense - - the God who comes, and it is always Christmas when in any present moment God enters the human heart. It is always happening - even now.

And there are those of you who know for a fact that Sunday after Sunday as you come to this place God is making Himself real in the present moment. When

the true story of this church is written, it will always have its grand and wonderful chapter, how in the present moment, perchance right now, Christ is entering the heart of the person alongside of you, in front of you or behind you - - maybe your heart!

And the most glorious of all aspects of this invasion on the part of God is that when He comes, He comes to save us from our sin. This is the true joy, that Christ is the God who comes as Redeemer. There is nothing like it for the human heart.

* * *

"THE DIFFERENCE CHRISTMAS MAKES"

The sermon on this Sunday after Christmas bears the title: "The Difference Christmas Makes" and the text is the 12th verse of the second chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

" - - and they returned unto their own country
another way."

Please do not read this text in the plain, ordinary, prosaic manner in which you are accustomed to reading it, for there is much more here than meets the eye. There's no gainsaying the fact, because of the wickedness which claimed the mind and the heart of Herod, the wise men were warned by God that they were not to return to their own country in the same way by which they had traveled to Bethlehem, but rather, there was to be a change in travel plans.

But there's something more involved here than just geography; for while this is the plain truth of the text, implicit in the text is the thought that when the wise men returned, even though they returned to their own country, they did return differently, and that difference lies in the fact that they were different men.

Something had happened in Bethlehem.....

They had been confronted by the fact of God....

They had seen what other people had hoped to see - - they
had seen God in the face of Jesus Christ!

...now, this makes a difference. It makes a difference in the lives of men who had been longing and hoping for this to happen. It even makes a difference in the lives of men and women who can't even call it by name.

It has been established that there is no season in the church year, there is no season in the calendar, whether it be the church year or whether it not be the church year, that has such merriment, such brightness, as the Christmas season. And there are those who maintain that this is true because at Christmas there's always a little bit more of God shining through in people's lives than at any other time. The wise men had gone to Bethlehem...now when it was all over they went back to their own country, but they went back differently, and the difference was in them and not simply a geographical routing.

What was it that happened at Bethlehem?

May I suggest that you recognize at once the fact that when they went to Bethlehem they saw God!

...this is the tragedy of our age - - that we have many wonderful things happening, and all too seldom men take their finger to their lips and whisper with the utmost of reverence the name of GOD. We may not have said it in much the same way as the Russian cosmonaut, that when he returned from outer space that he didn't see God anywhere - - yet this is the sad thing that is said about many people....while they may benefit from many marvels of science today

...and this is the age of scientific achievement, make no mistake about that! - - and all that's happening now is but a prelude to even more wonderful things yet to occur

...but where is the man, where is the woman, in our age, who being completely astounded by the advances being made in our time, who will take his finger to his lips and reverently whisper the name GOD?

The older I become, the more grateful I am for the fact that I stem from Near-Eastern stock; for even from the days of my childhood I was taught to believe that God is the primary, the secondary force in all things. As a youngster, if the sun would shine, mother would allow us to believe it was because that was

the way God wanted it to be. If it rained when we were going to have a Sunday school picnic, there was no question about it - - that's exactly the way God wanted it to happen that day. God allowed everything to happen. For the Near-Eastern mind, God is the primary, the secondary force. Everything is tied up in the mind of God. Nothing happens without God's knowledge. Nothing happens without God's permission. Nothing happens except but what God can be glorified through it. Unmistakably and clearly, the fingerprint of God is seen in the Near-Eastern mind on anything that might occur.

The sad thing about Western man is he projects the image of man into anything and everything that might occur. Man gets the credit for it - - man gets the blame for it. When the wise men went to Bethlehem, they went away from Bethlehem whispering only one name.....GOD.

This is the sad thing for many of us - -

....God is no longer seen

....God is no longer heard

....God is no longer experienced for all too many people

....God remains the forgotten word in our vocabulary,

....God remains the forgotten force in all of life that

surrounds us

We have so much more learning than the wise men. We are so far better educated than any of them could ever have been in their day. Yet theirs was a wisdom far greater than ours, for when they went to Bethlehem and saw what took place, they had only one word for it.....GOD.

Now this made a difference in these men.

They had seen God in action....they had experienced God.

And when they went away from Bethlehem, going back to their own country,

they mused upon the God that they had seen - - a God who would come in the form of a tiny helpless baby. Ah! they were looking for a king, but they were led to a manger stall, and there they had nothing to look at except the face of a child. Now this made a difference in these wise men, because they were forced to admit that God can use the insignificant, God can use the helpless, God can use, if you please, a tiny baby.

Let us think of that for a moment....that when God sees fit to work a great miracle, His preferred method is always through a person. In the first parish that I served I followed a man who was a veritable patriarch. He had been the shepherd of that congregation for almost half a century. The members of that congregation had come to love and to esteem him. I was not at all disturbed, but deeply pleased, I dare say, when a member of that congregation told me that whenever he thought of God he thought of my predecessor, Dr. Bannon; for he was the only pastor that he had ever known, and he was such a godly man that everything about him turned the thoughts of my friend in the direction of God. Oh, God can work through the earthquake and God can work through the wind and God can work through the fire and God can work through the flood and God can work through the terrible upheavals of mankind in the catastrophic.....but every now and then when God wants to do something, if I may put it this way - - exceedingly wonderful,...He reaches for a human being.

And when these wise men went away from Bethlehem they went away in the knowledge of the fact that God had stooped to earth, and God was going to work through a human being right now, a person.....and who knows, when they looked at Mary and when they looked at Joseph, they also said, This, too, is part of God's way of working through people!

Now it could be that for some of us, whenever we think of God we think of people. We may be appalled by certain things that happen in the natural world,

but there is absolutely no substitute whatsoever for basic character and integrity that bears the stamp of Jesus Christ. And there are those of us here right now who when we think of God, see the face of a pastor, a deaconess, a Sunday School teacher.....and if you can be as fortunate as this, a father or a mother. When the wise men went away from Bethlehem they went away different men because now they had seen God at work through a human being.

Brett Harte in one of his novels tells about what happened in the north country where a certain band of prospectors had gone out looking for gold. For one reason or another there was only one woman in the whole outfit. She died. And she left behind her a tiny baby. Brett Harte tells us the kind of men they were, and what happened to them when they were exposed to the innocence and helplessness of a baby.....one of the miners took it upon himself to tidy up the cabin, to keep it clean for the baby...another of the miners took it upon himself to see that the baby was fed....another did the laundry. In the course of a few weeks it was noted that whenever the miners came anywhere near the cottage where the baby was, the curses left their lips....no vain talk....no boisterous behavior. They were exposed to the innocence, even the helplessness, of a baby.

When the wise men went to Bethlehem, they were exposed to the beauty and the love, and if you please, the helplessness of God in the face of a child. There are some of us who are parents who without hesitation admit that we began to take a different route through life once we became parents. For the child in our midst transformed us, and we began to look at life differently from that point on.

When the wise men went back to their own country, they went back differently because they were different men. They saw something that was unmistakably God, and what was unmistakably God was tied up in the form of a human being. I've always respected the Quakers, and I suppose for this above all reasons: the Quaker is forever going through life looking for that which is God in every human

being that he sees. And who knows, when the wise men went back to their own country, they went back looking at every human being that they saw as though God were in that person, too.

In the Moslem world there used to be an understanding that no scrap of paper was ever considered insignificant, for no matter how small a scrap of paper might be, there was something upon which the name of Allah, the name of God, could be written. The wise men went back to their own country differently because they were different men - - obsessed, possessed, by the notion that on the face of any human being there might be something of the stamp of God. How different your journey through life could be if you would be so exposed to the love and the grace of God that you would look for something of God in the face of every human being that you might meet!

The last observation concerning this text:

- - they went back to their own country - -

....that's the last place that some of us want to return after we've tasted something wonderful. We want to tell somebody, and we don't care to run the risk of being misunderstood, we don't care to run the risk of being ridiculed and laughed at.....

....do you think it was an easy thing for Mary to go back to Nazareth? and to tell her friends and her neighbors the wonderful thing that had happened?....for the friends and neighbors in Nazareth could be just like some of the friends and neighbors that we have....

....do you think it was an easy thing for the wise men to go back and tell the story of a star? to go back and to say, we went looking for a King, and we had to go to the end of the lot where they kept the animals, and we saw the face of a baby.....?

They went back to their own country.

And they couldn't be quite, of course - - you can't be exposed to something like that and not tell it!

I submit to you this morning that the most difficult place in the world for a good many of us is to go back home, to our own country, and there within the confines of the friends and neighbors in our own family circle to talk about God and what we have experienced in the face of Jesus Christ.

But the wise men went back to their own country.....

The shepherds went back to the Judean hills.....

Mary and Joseph went back to Nazareth.....

....because the people back home needed to know, too.

The star also belongs to them,

and the Saviour never becomes the private possession of any one member of the family.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)